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"TO ERR IS HUMAN, TO FORGIVE, DIVINE!" SAID DUNCAN.

A WORLDLY MARRIAGE

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"I WILL never forgive you the wrong you have done me," the girl said, her dark eyes blazing with outraged love and pride.

"Will you be reasonable, Estrella?" the man questioned, impatiently. His face was white with passion rather than pain. "If you leave me as you propose doing, you will create a scandal, which, for your own sake, I should imagine you would not wish. A runaway wife is always looked upon with some degree of suspicion."

The slow colour came up into her face, but the light did not die out of her eyes, neither did the line of her lips grow less firm.

"I will hide myself away—oh yes, well away from all your friends and associates. You shall

tell them what you please concerning my disappearance. Live with you as your wife I will not."

He seized her hands.

"Are you mad?" he cried, "that you are willing to relinquish all but a paltry income, scarcely sufficient to keep you in comfort! That is what you do if you leave me."

"I know what I am doing," she answered, steadily; and such firmness in one so young was strange. "I am not mad, although my wrongs might well make me so. I simply intend to go my way, with or without your consent—to leave you free to follow your inclinations, to rid you of my presence, which is so hateful to you. Surely you, least of any creature, should cavil at my conduct?"

"You are not leaving me free," he answered hoarsely, "and you know it; nothing but your death could do that."

"Then I wish with all my soul that I were dead. I hope the day on which you get your release may be very near."

"I do not wish your death," with some slight softening of manner; "I owe you too much for that. I am not wholly ungrateful, although you believe me so. Why cannot we live as other folks do who have married, as we did, for mutual convenience."

All in a moment her dark face grew ghastly. "Did you suppose I, too, lied when I promised to love, honour, and obey you. As Heaven is my witness, I held you dearer than life. I could have thanked you on my knees for the love I dreamed you gave me; I would have made any sacrifice for you that you might demand. Surely, surely, you knew this? You must have known it, for I was too unskilled in art to hide my passion from you."

She suddenly ceased, and hid her face in her hands, sobbing in a terrible abandon of woe.

"Oh, my husband! Oh, my husband! how could you play so cruel a trick upon me! You should have had pity on my youth and friendlessness. You might have robbed me of all my possessions, and I would not have reproached

you; but oh! you should have left my heart free!"

Duncan Reeves stood silent, conscience and heart alike upbraiding him for the part he had played towards his girl-wife.

For a little while Estrella sobbed on; then gradually regaining her composure she glanced at him through her shivering fingers, and said,—

"I think we have no more to say to each other. I will see Mr. Lyon about this business, and then I will leave you for ever. It is better so."

"I have behaved very badly to you, Estrella, but if you will overlook my offence I swear I will do my duty by you. For Heaven's sake, let us avoid a scandal. I won't have any slur cast upon my name."

"Your name!" she cried, with indignant scorn, "always your name! I am less than nothing to you. You do not consider me at all—only your pride, and the honour of your race."

The old, cold look marked his face once more. "If you would but control your passion and be persuaded to listen to reason, I should be thankful," he said, icily. "It is ill-recked to be so violent."

"Am I violent?" she asked, wearily. "Well, at least I am sincere. I am no woman of the world. Oh, Heaven! I am scarcely more than a child, and have a whole long life of misery before me!"

"Why need you be miserable? You have position and wealth, are young and will probably be beautiful two or three years hence; you have full liberty to come and go as you please. I will in no way interfere with your plans and amusements. I promise never to bore you with my presence—"

"Silence!" cried the young wife. "Silence! you are aggravating your offence. Say no more. I am resolved, and to-day we part. I wish you would kiss me!" and here her voice broke pitifully. "You have never kissed me voluntarily yet, and when you come home you will find me gone."

He scarcely believed her; she was so young to defy all laws, to set him at naught. She was friendless, too, an orphan, without a single relative in the world.

So he laughed scornfully, and told her to be less tragic, and as the clear deep notes of his voice struck the air she shivered and sank once more upon her couch. Duncan moved towards the door.

"I shall return for luncheon," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Very well," Estrella answered, adding timorously, "You will not kiss me good-bye?"

"No, I shall hold out against you until you are more docile," and without another word he left her.

When he had gone Estrella did not indulge in tears or moans. She sat silent for awhile, and then, rising, she went up to her room and began to dress with feverish haste. Her toilet completed she went out, declining the carriage, and set her face steadily towards the great city. She walked so hurriedly, and was so evidently nervous, that folks stared curiously at her. There was such grace in her movements, such growing beauty on the white and red face, that men about town accosted her, and women turned to look after her. But she was unconscious of this, and as she held on her way, despair in her eyes, despair in her heart. She went down Fleet-street, where the noise and traffic frightened and bewildered her; then she turned down a dingy court, and came at last to a door, on which was painted, "A. Lyon, Solicitor." She tapped nervously, and was bidden to enter by a not unkindly voice; and passing in she found herself face to face with a middle-aged man of prepossessing appearance.

"My dear Miss Moore—I beg pardon—Mrs. Reeves. What lucky chance has brought you to my den!"

"Call me by my old name," she answered, swiftly. "Mr. Lyon, I have left my husband!"

"Good-heavens!" he ejaculated, "you can't mean this! You don't understand what you

are saying; only two months married! Estrella, it is impossible. You are joking, my dear."

"Do I look like jesting?" she asked, in an unconsciously tragic tone. "I am in deadly earnest, and I come to you for help." Little by little she told her sad story to this man, her dead father's truest friend, and always her kindest adviser. He listened with darkening brows and compressed lips, and when she had finished took her poor tremulous hands in his, and drew her nearer.

"You, poor child!" he said, huskily, "you have indeed met with rough usage, and I am powerless to help you. No man can come between husband and wife; you are irrevocably united to Duncan Reeves."

"I know, I know," Estrella interrupted impatiently, "but he will be glad to let me go my own way, provided he has his heart's desire. I want to hide myself from him, and from her, and you must help me."

"What do you propose doing?" Mr. Lyon questioned perplexedly.

"Going to Mrs. Phelps; she will take me in; she loved me always. Of course Duncan takes all the estates and rents; as he married my fortune let him keep it, I will not touch a penny."

"This is absurd, quixotic; you will repent such a step."

"No, no; the farm and cottages at Glemsdale left me by my godmother bring me in a hundred and fifty per annum—quite sufficient for my wants, and he will hardly grudge me so small a sum. You must see me off at once to Rushford, as the last train leaves Victoria at 2.30; I examined a time-table before I came down here."

"You will repent," Mr. Lyon said again. "My dear, you scarcely know what you propose doing; by this one step you may blight your whole life."

"All night," she murmured, "all night I lay awake, trying to see some way out of my calamity, some way by which to relieve him of my continual presence in his home. And I could see none but this. Will you fall me now! If you do, I will disappear so effectually as to leave no trace by which you can discover me. Think, I shall then be not only alone, but absolutely penniless, and there will remain nothing for me but the river."

"My child, my child!" his heart aching for her, and at the change he saw in her; she had suddenly become a woman by virtue of her woe; there was not the least remnant of the old Estrella in her manner or speech; all the half-clinging, wholly confiding air which had made her so charming was gone now and for ever.

"He never loved me," she said drearily; "he will be glad to hear I am as one dead to him."

"But whilst you live he cannot marry another woman, Estrella."

"That is to be lamented. I wish that he were free. Oh! with all my heart I wish it! Now get ready for our journey, please, whilst I write a few last lines to him."

She hastily scribbled a few words, and placing her note in an envelope, sealed and addressed it to Duncan Reeves; then she rose and taking Mr. Lyon's arm went out with him into the noise and turmoil of the streets.

It was night when Duncan returned home, and he hoped that Estrella had become frightened at his long absence, and would be ready to listen to reason. It struck him that the house was unnaturally still, and he concluded that she had gone to bed; so he went to his favourite room, known as his "den," a bachelor-looking apartment where none were allowed to enter save his valet and himself. On the table, placed in a most conspicuous position, was a letter, and he recognised the handwriting as his wife's. With a vague sense of alarm he tore open the envelope, and read her few and farewell words.

"Husband, I am leaving you now and for ever. You are free in a measure, and I should be glad if my death might soon rid you of all loathsome ties. Mr. Lyon will tell you all that I have done and if you would keep your conscience clean of murder—if you would have any claim to be called merciful—you will leave me unmolested. Should

you disobey my wish I shall take refuge in suicide, for live with you again I never will. I have loved you well. I would have loved you always, but by your own act you have put me away, killed that passion I had suffered myself to feel for you; and so, being on the threshold of life, I say good-bye to the world, and to love. Few of your friends have seen me, some perhaps do not know of my existence, and by all I shall soon be forgotten. Let all the blame be mine, I shall neither hear nor grieve over it.—ESTRELLA."

Duncan stared at the letter as though he fancied his eyesight had deceived him. He had known his young wife until to-day only in her softer moods, and he did not believe her capable of resolute or desperate action. Now she had upset all his theories in a moment, and at first he felt at a loss how to act. He was angry that she should have fled from him—angry at the nine days' scandal her flight would cause; but he saw clearly that nothing remained to him but to go to Mr. Lyon for information concerning her, and to bring her back, if that were possible.

Despite the late hour he started for the solicitor's private residence, and reached it just as the servants were making the doors fast for the night. He pleaded important business as an excuse for the lateness of his visit, and was shown at length into Mr. Lyon's study.

As he entered, the elder man turned slightly in his chair, and, seeing who his late visitor was, merely bowed, and motioned him to a seat. Flushing hotly at the change in his manner towards himself, Duncan said,—

"You can guess the object of my late intrusion, Mr. Lyon?"

"Yes, you have come for news of your wife. Pray be seated, as the discussion may prove lengthy. What have you to say upon the subject?"

"This, that you know her hiding-place; and I insist you should disclose it to me. Do you suppose I am going to have my name handed about from mouth to mouth?"

And at this point he grew irate. But the lawyer listened calmly, and when he had finished, said, coolly,—

"If you will discuss the matter quietly, I am willing to listen; but I won't have my household cognizant of my business, and I don't suppose my servants are more honourable than other folks. For aught I know to the contrary they may listen at keyholes and gossip of what they hear. I should suppose you wish Mrs. Reeves' flight to be kept secret? Well, now, that being understood, what do you propose doing?"

"Bringing Estrella back to her home," Duncan answered, tersely.

"Just so. But the lady has a will of her own. What if she refuses to return? You would scarcely like to use brute force!" with a frigid glance at the young man.

"The law is on my side, sir; and I shall exercise a husband's rights—a husband's authority."

"And what about a husband's affection, sir? Are you prepared to give that?"

Duncan flashed darkly, and, seeing that Mr. Lyon went on ruthlessly,—

"Let us understand each other. You have treated your wife with uniform coldness. Having won her lands and her fortune you do not care to win or keep her heart, however the case may be. You neglect her, leave her lonely hour after hour, day after day; finally, you allow her to learn you have not, and never had any affection for her; in fact, that she is distasteful to you—that all the passion of which you are capable has been given to another woman. Well, sir, you have changed her from a loving, trustful child to a miserable and bitter woman; and, if you persist in knowing her hiding-place, you force her to further desperate deeds."

"By this time," Duncan said, contemptuously, "she is repenting her folly, and will be only too glad to return on my conditions."

"I doubt it. You apparently forget that from her mother she inherits all the characteristics of the Italian race—great capacities for love and hate—and what reason has she to love you?"

strong impulses, and probably thirst for revenge. Let her alone. She has left you all you longed for—all for which you perjured yourself—keeping back only the little farm at Glemdale. Give her what she so strongly desires—freedom."

"Both you and she have a convenient way of ignoring all conjugal ties. Her flight leaves me in a worse condition than before. Much as I may wish, I cannot marry any other woman, although, to all intents and purposes, I shall be a bachelor."

"Allow me to remind you that I know all the circumstances of the case, and that I think you undeserving of pity. You selected your own life. Of what can you complain? You played for a high stake. You have won. Estrella's flight relieves you of the only evil in your lot. Be content."

"Well, but my name!" urged Duncan.

"Confound your name," said Mr. Lyon getting really incensed; "it isn't the only one under the sun; and I have small doubt that at some not long distant period an ancestor disgraced himself in one way or another. Every family has an occasional black sheep. Why should yours prove an exception to the rule? But let me urge upon you the necessity of leaving Mrs. Reeves to follow out her own plans. If you press her too hard she will take her own life in despair."

Long they talked together, and by dint of persuasion and reasoning Mr. Lyon extracted a promise from Duncan to leave Estrella free to follow her wishes. He was to enjoy her property, to take all good and pleasant things so long as he did not molest her.

And when the door closed upon him Mr. Lyon muttered,—

"Poor child! poor child! but just seventeen, and all her life blighted by that scamp."

CHAPTER II.

WHY did they part? was the question that folks asked each other concerning the Reeves' separation. But no one could answer the query satisfactorily; some said "incompatibility of temper;" others that Duncan Reeves was ashamed of his youthful bride, that he had already wearied of her unconcealed, almost pathetic, devotion.

One forward damsel proposed interviewing Duncan himself, but being afraid to follow out her own suggestion it fell flat; and the hero of the story was scarcely likely to volunteer information, for there was nothing in the past that could redound to his credit.

Rather more than two months ago he had been the possessor of a paltry three hundred a year, all his ancestral estates having gone to liquidate his father's debts.

The purchaser, a stockbroker, had been named Moore, who in his heart of hearts worshipped gentle birth, and felt sorry for the young man. He would have used the influence of money in behalf of Duncan, but he rejected his offers with scant courtesy, and less gratitude.

At that time Duncan had declared his love to Geraldine Swift, the beauty of the season, and she had answered that although she returned his passion marriage between them was impossible, as both were horribly poor.

He was mad with his misery, when a letter reached him from Mr. Moore, begging his immediate presence at Revestone Hall, as he was dying, and had something of importance to communicate.

Scarcely knowing what he hoped, Duncan lost no time in answering the summons, and reaching the Hall was led at once to the dying man's chamber. Here he learned that Mr. Moore had but one child, a daughter not quite seventeen, and about her future he was painfully agitated and anxious.

"She is so young and so wealthy," he said, pathetically; "some scamp of a fellow will woo her just for her fortune, and after making ducks and drakes of it, will end by breaking her heart. I think, Reeves, you are an honourable man, and would be kind to my Estrella. I know your dearest hope is to get back your estates. This

you may easily do, if you will only consent to marry her."

"But, my dear sir," Duncan had said, "is the young lady to have no voice in the matter?"

"Oh, she is half-won already; when you were down here last autumn she often saw you, and hearing of your troubles, and the way you bore them, has made quite a hero of you. Do you close with my offer?"

"You must allow me time to think," Duncan answered, his mind in a perfect whirl. "You are asking me to take a most important step all in the dark."

"Your hesitation is creditable to you; most young men would have jumped at such a proposal as mine. Well, take time, but not too long, for a few days at most will close my life. Lyon knows of my plan, and is against it; but then he is a lawyer and must find something to quibble about."

"And when am I to see Miss Moore? Pardon me, sir, but for all I know to the contrary, she may be deformed or imbecile."

The father smiled.

"You shall see her now!" and he summoned the girl at once to the room.

When Duncan saw her he could scarcely conceal his disappointment and chagrin. He detected dark women, and this little unformed girl was very dark, with hair and eyes the colour of a raven's wings; her beauty was yet in the bud, but a less prejudiced observer would have seen that one day it would be of a superb order.

The father took her slender hand in his, saying,—

"This is Mr. Reeves, my child. Mr. Reeves, my daughter Estrella."

The girl bowed and answered his few questions shyly, then escaped to her own room, fluttered not a little by the meeting with a man she had long exalted into a hero; and Duncan had tried to speak of her eulogistically, but he had stammered and grown incoherent in his speeches.

But Mr. Moore did not notice his strange manner; he never doubted the young man's eagerness for the match, he never dreamed that he was laying the foundation of much woe for his darling.

The temptation was a terrible one to Duncan, but he made one effort against it. He wrote to Geraldine Swift, telling her of Mr. Moore's quixotic offer, and begging her to help him in his decision by promising to marry him on his return to town. Her answer was speedy and terse.

"There was no other course open to you. You must marry this little nobody and forget me. I dare not become the wife of a poor man."

Stung to madness by the mercenary reply, he sought Mr. Moore.

"I have come to say, sir, I agree to your proposal thankfully, always providing I am not distasteful to Miss Moore."

Then he set himself to win this innocent child's heart. It was not a difficult task, especially when one remembered she had been trained to think him a hero.

He was a man of six-and-twenty, well versed in the ways of the world; she is a simple romantic girl, lacking a month of seventeen years.

He stormed and took the citadel in a very few days, and when Mr. Moore proposed he should get the special licence he consented, feeling very much like a man going to execution.

When he spoke to Estrella of marrying she shrank back, frightened, pleading that she was so young, praying him to wait awhile.

But the end was very near for her father, and one day she was summoned to his room, to find her lover and a clergyman already there.

Kneeling beside the bed she pledged her troth to this man who so short a time since had been a stranger to her. She knelt down Estrella Moore, she rose Estrella Reeves.

All day her father continued to need her presence, so that she had no chance of observing her husband minutely, or she might have felt some alarm at the gloominess of his looks.

At night she sent a servant to summon him to her father's side.

Joshua Moore was almost beyond speech; but he signed to the young man to take Estrella's hand, and faintly murmured,—

"Be good to her."

They were his last words; a little later Estrella knew she was an orphan, and flinging herself upon the bed beside her father burst into wild sobs, terrible, heart-breaking moans.

Duncan had been most good to her then. He had been less than man not to be touched by her sorrow, and when he lifted her in his arms, and carried her to an adjoining room, she clung to him, sobbing out that she was all alone now, there was none left to love her save himself. He was tender and considerate, too, in the days immediately following, and she was docile as a child.

When the will had been read (and he found himself sole and undisputed successor of the Revestone estates, and a very considerable fortune besides) he carried his bride to town, the season then being at its height.

Of course, owing to her recent loss, Estrella could take no part in the festivities; but she never complained when Duncan left her alone, hour after hour. Only on his return she would watch him wistfully, and yearn for some sign of tenderness, but none ever came. He treated her with a distant courtesy that chilled her heart, but she was afraid to remonstrate.

"Perhaps," she thought in her ignorance, "it is the way of this world, and I must try to be content; but, oh! if sometimes he would kiss me, how glad and thankful I should be!"

He came and went as he pleased, and always, as he drew near his own home, the gloom on his face darkened, because he knew, waiting very patiently for him, before her favourite window, was the woman he called wife.

Sometimes his conscience smote him for his conduct towards the hapless girl, but oftener he regarded himself as a man sorely to be pitied—a man who had been the sport of a cruel fate.

Oh! if he were only free again! His old home might go, as long as he had a chance of winning Geraldine.

Vain regrets and vain desires made his days and nights alike wearisome. He visited all the haunts of fashion, and so, almost daily met the woman who had so enslaved him, who held him bound to her chariot-wheels, despite his marriage vows.

Folks almost forgot Estrella's very existence, or said amongst themselves there was something curious about her, as she was never visible. Was she deformed, or a natural?

At last, for very shame, Duncan elected to appear at a small dinner-party with her, and the poor child dressed herself with especial care, hoping to win some favour in his sight.

But when she ran down, robed all in heavy black silk, high at the throat, and concealing her pretty arms, with no ornament save a white flower in her hair, he looked at her with a coldly displeased glance.

So at the very beginning the child's evening was spoiled. It was a very miserable little face that met the kindly hostess's friendly eyes, and she began to regret that Geraldine Swift was to be of the party.

A big stupid man took Estrella down, and when she was seated he left her wholly to her own devices.

She began shyly to criticise the guests, and wondered a little who the woman was who sat opposite her, with Duncan on her left, and a professor on her right hand.

A tall fair woman, very beautiful to look upon, but very evil—a woman who delighted in bending men to her will, in winning hearts and casting them aside as broken toys; a woman who had no ruth, no sweet compassion, who fed her pride and vanity by doing her utmost to win other women's lovers from their allegiance.

Such was Geraldine Swift. Proud, poor, selfish, having no tenderness for any human being save herself and Duncan Reeves, and him she would not wed, because of her dread of poverty.

But she still held him in her toils; she would not, or could not, let him go.

On this particular night she was looking especially lovely, in a dress of dull red silk; her wealth of golden hair was coiled in heavy plaits on the crown of her head, and ornamented with pearl and ruby stars.

Folks often wondered how Geraldine could dress so well, being unaware that no day passed without an application from some long suffering creditor for payment of this or that account; and how she had so long succeeded in keeping them at bay was a mystery even to herself.

She fascinated Estrella as the serpent fascinates the helpless rabbit, and presently, leaning nearer her partner, she asked timidly,—

"Who is that handsome lady—my *vis-à-vis*?"

He scarcely lifted his eyes from his plate, as he answered (wholly forgetful of Estrella's name), "Miss Swift. If you were not a *débutante* you would know Geraldine—everybody does. She is the loveliest blonde in town, and has heaps of admirers. We all thought she would marry Reeves, and I am sure he was desperately in love with her; but he has gone and married a girl whom nobody knows. I suppose her fortune tempted him."

Having said so much he "died away into silence," and again attacked his soup, altogether unconscious of his partner's sudden pallor, or the anguish in her eyes.

She was glad enough when the hostess gave the signal to rise. Geraldine's eyes were bent upon her in contemptuous scrutiny, but she was unconscious of her look.

"So," said the blonde, "that is your wife! I pity you Duncan. She is so extremely *gauche*," and then she passed out with the other ladies.

As she swept into the drawing-room, so proud, so beautiful and stately, Estrella's heart grew sick with envy and undefined dread. "Was it true," she asked herself sadly, "was it true Duncan had loved this woman once? If so, why had he forsaken her? Oh! Heaven forbid that her own fortune had tempted him from his allegiance. Oh! thought the poor little simpleton, "he must have loved me to make me his wife. When we are at home I will ask him."

When the gentlemen joined them, and she sat lonely in an obscure corner, an impulse to rush away from them all seized her, and, rising, she quietly effected her escape to the large and beautiful conservatories. Seated amongst flowers and ferns, hidden well away from all, she gave herself up to many and sad thoughts. From the drawing-room came faint echoes of melody; fragments of new and popular songs, light careless laughter, and the indistinct murmur of high-bred voices. She was roused from her reverie by a woman's voice of clear and bell-like quality, but cruel withal.

"Having seen her, I am not surprised at your aversion to her. She is simply a little barbarian, black as a Moor, and as unlovely!"

"And yet, Geraldine, you counselled the marriage?" a man's voice answered, and Estrella covered her face with her hands and strove not to cry aloud, for the voice was Duncan's.

"What else could I do? Would your marriage set us more effectually apart than your poverty? You should esteem yourself a lucky man."

"Lucky! when I have lost you?" passionately. "You might spare me that taunt; it is hardly womanly to make sport of my misery."

Estrella leaned forward and peered at them through the thick-growing leaves; they were standing amongst ferns and bright-hued tropical plants that made a fitting back-ground to this lovely woman.

Duncan's eyes dwelt passionately upon the fair, evil face, the wealth of braided hair.

"Heavens!" he said, hoarsely, "how I love you! Your beauty drives me mad! There are times when to be free I could murder her."

The woman leaned nearer to him.

"You hate her!" she questioned, a gleam of malicious triumph in her turquoise eyes.

"Can I do otherwise when she stands between us? I turn with awful loathing from her. Her mere touch makes me angry."

"Pity me, pity me!" whispered the wretched listener, deep down in her breaking heart. But how should he hear, and, not hearing, why should he spare her a single pang!

"We are an ill-assorted pair—I a man of the world, she a child who should yet be in the school-room. She of the masses, I as far removed by birth from her as I am by my love for you, we have no taste, no wish, in common. Geraldine, it was an ill-day for both when you advised my marriage, an ill-hour when I acted upon it. Why, oh! why, if you loved me did you not risk all, poor as I was! I had influential friends who would have assisted me to something by which to increase my income."

"You know you are talking wildly, Duncan. Surely you see what an unsuitable wife I should be for a poor man! My dear, oh! my dear, I shall love you all my life; and surely now and again we shall have glimpses of happiness. Is it not happiness to meet thus?"

"No," he cried, hoarsely, "because you are not for me; because I must stand by whilst others hover near you, woo you before my very eyes."

"You have your wife to console you; I am alone," she said, coldly.

"Poor little soul!" he replied, a momentary touch of pity stirring his heart. "I wonder what she would say if she knew all, for upon my honour I believe she loves me."

The listener wrung her hands piteously, but made no moan.

"Take me back, Duncan," murmured the voice Estrella had grown in a moment to hate; "our absence will be commented upon, and your wife will be exhibiting jealousy."

"Kiss me," he demanded; and then they stood locked in each other's embrace, and Estrella heard and saw their passionate kisses.

She felt blind and sick, but still she kept silence; and long after, when Duncan went to search for her, he found her sitting, white and cold, amongst the flowers and statues.

She was very quiet during the drive home, and reaching there went at once to her room. But she did not sleep; all night she knelt in agony beside her bed, and tried to see her way clearly.

In the morning she went down pale and heavy-eyed, and then followed the interview, the result of which we know. Small wonder that, recalling all things, Duncan Reeves felt lessened in his own esteem; and yet he was glad at first that Estrella was gone. Her dark eyes would no longer haunt him with reproachful tenderness, her mere presence disgust and anger him.

She was gone from him, and there was little to remind him of the last two months. Yet how horribly still the house was! He would shut it up and go into chambers. He was exercised in his mind as to where and with whom she had hidden herself, but he could hear nothing of her. And soon he began to forget her save at odd moments, unless he thought of Geraldine; and then the shackles that bound him weighed so heavily upon him that he almost prayed for the death of her whose generosity had so benefited him.

CHAPTER III.

FOUR years had passed since that tragic parting in the West-end breakfast-room, and Geraldine Swift was still unmarried. Despite her birth and her beauty, men were rather chary of offering to share their all with her. She had won such a name for heartlessness and coquetry that they were inclined to "fight shy" of her; besides which, the more particular considered her manner towards Duncan Reeves a great deal too familiar, and were apt to speak pityingly of the little wife who disappeared as quickly and effectually as a comet from the sky.

The fair beautiful face of the blonde was often shadowed now by discontent, for she saw other and plainer women succeed where she failed; and she knew that in a few years at most her beauty would begin to wane, for she was now twenty-six.

Perhaps she had aimed too high. Well, now she must be content with lower game, and so she had

set herself to win the liking of an Anglo-Indian of almost fabulous wealth, determined that, if need were, she would utterly separate herself from the man she loved so well, in her own queer way.

It was the beginning of the season, and all the town was on the *qui vive* to see and hear the young violinist whose *début* had been the theme of society papers for weeks past. It was said that Madame Neruda must look to her laurels, the artiste was second only to Paganini, and all the fashionable world had obtained tickets for the classical concert at which Miss Phelps was to make her appearance. Who she was, where she came from, and whether she were beautiful or no, were questions that occupied the minds of the idle ones.

On the eve of the concert the violinist stood in her room before a pier-glass regarding herself with critical, yet openly appreciative, eyes. She turned with a brilliant smile to her companion, a white-haired lady.

"I think I shall do, auntie," she said, and her voice was "like the warble of a bird."

"You are at your best, my love; but I am frightened for you. If you should fail—if you should break down?"

"My dear, I shall not fail," in an emphatic tone. "You forget I have two thoughts to nerve me for the trial. One is that if I succeed to-night I am a made woman, can command my own terms, and make even *him* envy my fame; the other is that in my triumph lies my revenge."

Her eyes flashed as she spoke, and the rich crimson flooded her olive cheek, tinged even her ears with a rosy glow.

"Now, dear, give me my cloak; the carriage is at the door," and followed by her faithful *duenna* she went down, carrying her beloved violin with her.

The room was full; Geraldine, radiantly beautiful in sea-green, occupied a seat in the front tier; and leaning over her was Duncan Reeves, very much changed outwardly.

His thirty years had apparently weighed heavily upon him; for there were lines on the broad brow, and silver threads in the dark hair that were strange in one so young.

Geraldine lifted languid eyes to his face.

"How long before she appears?"

"Her solo is next on the programme," he said, referring to the printed paper. "Ah! here she comes! What a lovely girl!"

"I thought," Geraldine said, coldly, "you disliked dark women."

"As a rule, yes; but one must accord Miss Phelps her due."

The *débutante* bowed lowly, and then began to adjust her instrument.

Beautiful! Yes, that was the general verdict. She was dressed in trailing robes of deep orange silk. Her hair, done *à la Grec*, was guiltless of ornament, as were her throat and wrists.

She was scarcely above the medium height, but she looked taller, which, perhaps, was owing to the style of her dress.

There was an intense silence as the first notes of one of Beethoven's divinest solos sounded through the room. Upward and onward the melody floated, sometimes soft, sometimes rising, as if in a wail of despair; then came an Allegro movement, divinely beautiful, divinely executed, and when it closed, the girl knew by the *furore* of applause that she was a success.

As she bowed her acknowledgments again and again a smile passed over her exquisite features, and Duncan wondered of whom she reminded him, but he said very little to Geraldine. Much as he was infatuated by her, he knew it was dangerous to praise another woman overmuch to her.

The next day all London talked of the new artiste, raved of her style, her beauty, and youth. Papers prophesied a glorious career for her; men discussed her at their clubs, and women were proportionately envious of this girl, of whom it might be said, *Veni, vidi, vici*.

As the season advanced she became more and more the rage; she was offered more engagements than she could accept. No concert was complete without her; soon no social gathering was voted successful if she were absent.

And so at last Duncan Reeves met her face to face. His hostess, a chatty, motherly woman, led him to Miss Phelps's chair, and having introduced them left them together.

The girl was a trifle paler than usual, but her eyes were bright, and her composure perfect.

Duncan sat down beside her, his heart beating a little faster than was its wont. He had met her so often in public that her beauty had made rather an impression upon him, and he knew now of whom she reminded him. It was of his poor little wife; although, as he said, he scarcely knew why such a thing should be. Estrella was so small, so pale, so altogether insignificant; whilst this girl's beauty was so great that none could pass her unnoticed.

Perhaps it was the trick of her smile. Estrella, he remembered, had rather a pretty smile; or it might be that her gestures were like that poor unhappy girl's. But why should he think of her to-night? Did not her memory haunt him always? Well, then, he would forget her for a few hours.

He turned towards his companion, with a slow smile lighting the depths of his dark eyes.

"You should be a happy woman, Miss Phelps! I feel it is almost presumption to imagine you can be anything else."

The sweet face framed in dusky hair was bent attentively, yet smilingly, upon him.

"I am happy," she said, in a soft voice, "I live for my art."

"And that alone satisfies you? You have no desire for anything but fame?"

"Why should I?" she questioned, slowly fanning herself; "it fills my life."

He sighed.

"I envy you!" he said, "it is well to have an object."

"And have not you?" with calm eyes fixed upon his face.

"No," blithely: "my life is a spoiled, a purposeless one. But I am not going to inflict a recital of my woes upon you. Our acquaintance is too slight to permit such a thing, even should I wish it." Then, abruptly, "Your name is English, but are you?"

"Partly; why do you ask?" and she flushed deeply.

"Because your beauty—pardon, I mean no flattery—is so very un-English. You remind me strangely of a lady I knew long since."

"Was she a great friend of yours?" Miss Phelps asked with gentle interest, and she saw Duncan pale under her words.

"She ought to have been, and I believe would have been had I but allowed it. I often reproach myself for a wrong I did her."

Her proud, beautiful lips quivered a moment, and then grew firm.

"I am sorry for her," the girl said, simply; "but why did you not confess the wrong and ask pardon? Perhaps to this day she is grieved because of you."

"No, no!" he answered, warmly, "she parted from me in anger, vowing never to forgive me. That is four years since, and we have never met. Perhaps it is best so; for sorry as I am that I gave her pain, I cannot regret her loss."

Miss Phelps stooped to rearrange a perverse ribbon; when she lifted her head again she was quite white, but she said, placidly,—

"Of course this poor soul loved you?"

"I am afraid so. But you are ill; let me get you something."

"No, no," laughing softly, "the room is hot, and heat always deprives me of my colour. Do you know, Mr. Reeves, you have recalled some words to me concerning men's faith, and as they are spoken by one of your sex you will hardly complain that they are unjust. Listen!"

"Our fancies are more giddy and infirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won
Than woman's are."

Of course you deny this? That goes without saying; but you told me you did not regret your friend's loss. May I ask why? Was she not a good girl?"

"I believe so. I fancy she had all the domestic virtues in full force."

"I wonder what she is now!" musingly.

"Aren't you curious to know how you have changed her, for of course she is changed?"

And then before he could reply others joined them, and he had no further chance of private speech with her. But her words haunted him all through the long, sad night; and he half resolved that on the morrow he would go to Mr. Lyon, and force him to divulge Estrella's hiding-place. But when morning came he laughed at his folly, telling himself they were better—far better—apart.

If he could have seen the gifted artiste in her own room he would have been not a little surprised and enlightened. She lay face downwards on the bed, sobbing in a terrible abandonment of woe.

"Oh, Duncan! Duncan!" she moaned; "even to-night I would have forgiven you had you but spoken kindly of me, had you sorrowed for my sorrow. I could have forgiven and loved you. Oh! why were you so hard?"

After that night they often met, and soon Duncan begged and obtained permission to visit her at her own home. She had given up her quiet suburban lodgings, and now rented a pretty, bijou house at Kensington, which she had made lovely after an artistic fashion of her own.

Slowly it dawned upon the man that the lovely young violinist was growing too dear to him for his own peace; that, little by little, she was thrusting Geraldine from her place. He hated himself for his falseness, he cursed himself for his folly.

What had he to do with love, seeing that Estrella still lived! for surely were she dead Mr. Lyon would have communicated that fact to him.

Miss Swift was not slow to see the change in her old lover, and resented it hotly. She loved him still? Why should he grow cold towards her. What woman had done her this cruel harm!

She watched him carefully, and soon she was in the possession of his secret, and determined to win him back at any cost. One night she met Miss Phelps at the house of a mutual friend, and cleverly contrived to gain a few minutes' speech with her.

"Miss Phelps," she said, in her sweetest tones, "I am going to take a great liberty, and I am positively afraid that I shall make you seriously angry."

"My temper is not easily ruffled; what is it you wish to say?" and she toyed carelessly with her fan.

"It is about—about Mr. Reeves. I hardly know how to approach the subject, it is such a delicate one."

The other did not attempt to help her, and Geraldine went on very incoherently; with those beautiful calm eyes upon her she felt abashed. But the purport of her story was that, having a great and friendly interest in Miss Phelps, and feeling sincerely for her somewhat isolated condition, she could not let her compromise herself without giving her some warning.

"But how," asked the girl, "am I compromising myself?"

"By accepting Mr. Duncan's very obvious attentions," growing glib again; "as a matter of fact, he is not a free man."

"That cannot possibly concern me. He is but a casual acquaintance; and, believe me, I am perfectly able to take care of my name."

"But if I tell you he is already married, but separated from his wife?"

"I shall answer I know it. And, pardon me, Miss Swift, considering the relations that once existed between yourself and Mr. Reeves, I must confess I think your excessive interest in him imprudent;" with which little shaft Estrella moved away.

Days lengthened into weeks, weeks to months, and now the season was drawing to a close, and Duncan began to wonder vaguely what he should do when he lost his daily sight of the violinist. She was more to him than Geraldine had ever been; he loved her with the passion of perfected manhood, and he told himself his love was a sin—an insult to her.

Sometimes he wildly told his heart she was not wholly indifferent to him, and then he hated him-

self that for a moment he could wish her to share his misery. One night he escorted her to the Lyceum, and when they were returning he begged a flower of her—to keep in remembrance. Mrs. Phelps was apparently asleep, and both spoke in guarded whispers.

"Why should you so wish for my flowers!—they are faded."

"Give me one," he reiterated, stifled passion in his voice; "show me a little kindness to save me from madness!"

She resigned the roses and heliotrope she wore at her bosom to him; he caught her hand in his, and kissed it with fierce passion.

It seemed to her he would have spoken of love, when some sudden memory checked his speech, and, groaning, he dropped his head upon his hands. Oh! if he only dared catch her to him, hold her to his heart—the heart that would be full of her for evermore! But there was his wife; like a spectre she stood always between him and his happiness, and in that moment, as once before, he wished her dead.

Mrs. Phelps invited him to enter the house with them, but he declined. That night he was scarcely his own master. As he held the girl's hand in his he felt a slight shiver run through her, and looked quickly into her beautiful, mobile face. It was white and rigid, as though death had already set his seal upon it. The sweet mouth was compressed, and the dark eyes full of unutterable longing and pain.

"Oh, Heaven!" he muttered; "this is too hard. Miss Phelps, if you can pity one so lost as I, if you can compassionate a man who has wilfully and recklessly ruined his own happiness, who is so wretched that he would gladly lay down his life here and now, pity me, and pray for me. To-night my soul is in jeopardy."

So he left her, and she crept into the house like a wounded bird.

Mrs. Phelps looked anxiously into her face, and then drew her close to her bosom.

"Ah, dear—my dear," she whispered, "you will forgive! He loves you now."

"Does he love Estrella Reeves? No, no, no; it is the fashionable and famed artiste who has his heart—not I—not I! When he learns I am his wife he will love me no longer—a thing possessed loses all charm for him. Oh, auntie! oh, auntie! how shall I bear such pain and live? I love him, I love him. Oh! to my shame, my undying shame—I love him."

She hid her face on the true heart that never failed, and never would fail her, but she did not cry or moan. She lay very still in the close clasp of the tender arms that would fain have sheltered her from every ill wind that blew.

No further speech passed between them; and when Estrella, rousing herself, prepared to go upstairs, Mrs. Phelps did not attempt to detain or console her. Perhaps she knew there was no consolation for woe like Estrella's.

In a strange dreamy way Duncan reached his chambers, and lighting his lamp sat down to brood over his calamities. He would go to Mr. Lyon and ask him to communicate with his wife, to make the following proposals in his name. He would willingly resign all pretensions to money and estate; and if she wished it, and it were possible, he would endeavour to have their marriage annulled. He was very ignorant of the law, but he had a faint idea that, as Estrella had been a minor at the date the ceremony had taken place, and had been as it were coerced, any tie between them could be dissolved.

Well, at all events, it was worth a trial. Live with her he could not, and would not, even if she desired it, and he believed her far from wishing that.

He rose, and as he did so caught sight of an envelope upon the mantel, addressed in Geraldine's handwriting. With a sick sense of loathing and impatience he tore it open and read:—

"I must see you to-morrow; I have important news for you. Something has happened which will materially affect our lives. Do not fail me, for I am very wretched."

"G. S."

Confound the woman, will she never leave

me in peace!" he muttered, and tore the note in fragments.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY in the morning he kept his appointment with Geraldine. He was ushered into the room where she sat, less carefully dressed than usual with her, and looking very wan in the pitiless light of the sun.

As he entered she rose, and he saw she was very painfully agitated.

"Oh! how good you are to reply so soon to my message! I am glad you have come early, as mamma is not yet down, and we shall not be interrupted."

The prospect of a *tête à tête* with her did not seem to afford him much pleasure, and her jealous eyes noted this, and her heart (cold to all others) ached and throbbled with almost intolerable anguish.

"Are you not glad to be with me?" she questioned, all her passion gleaming in her eyes. "Duncan, tell me you are a little glad!"

His brows drew together in an ominous frown, but he answered gently,—

"Long ago, Geraldine, we agreed to say nothing of the mutual love which had made so many years miserable; we agreed to remember the existence of my wife."

"Be kind to me now," she pleaded, "for once forget your prudence; throw discretion to the winds. Just for one little hour let us be all in all to each other."

He thought of Estrella, and tried to picture her in Geraldine's position, but he could not. She was so pure, so good—the slightest slip seemed impossible to her. He moved uneasily.

"What news have you for me? You said something had happened which would change the current of your life."

"Last night," she answered, in a curiously sultry voice, "Mr. Goody did me the honour to propose marriage. His family, you know, is respectable, nothing more; but he has made a great fortune in India, and I believe he admires me very much."

"And what did you say, Geraldine?"

"What could I do but say yes? I am too poor to consult my heart in such a matter, and mamma's annuity dies with her."

"I wish you every happiness," Duncan said gently. He was really glad that he should at last be free of her importunity, and he hoped that her affection (like his) had cooled in its ardour.

He was very unpleasantly surprised when Geraldine, suddenly sprang to his side, and clasping her hands about his arm, cried, in a broken voice,—

"Duncan, oh! Duncan! has it come to this! Can you wish me happiness with another man! You, who have loved me! You whom I have loved with all my heart, so long, so long!"

He spoke coldly.

"Am I to blame, Geraldine? Had you but been true to yourself in the past you would now have been my beloved and honoured wife. But you were afraid of genteel poverty, and bade me do the deed which has ruined my life for all time."

She interrupted him passionately.

"I acted, as I believed, for the best. I thought only of your welfare!" A slow, cynical smile curved his lips, and seeing it, she went on more wildly, "Oh! how often have you made my heart ache of late. How often you have spoiled my days and filled my nights with torture! Have I deserved this from you? I, who have been so faithful through all these years; who have waited very patiently for a day that should dawn and find you free!"

The ill-taste of her remark jarred upon him, and he could have told her that her faithfulness had been principally due to the fact that no eligible *parti* had offered her marriage. But she was a woman, and once he had loved her—that had been in his hot youth. Well, well, let him console her if he could!

"Geraldine," and at the gentleness of his voice her face flushed with hope, "if this man

who would make you his wife is so detestable to you, would it not be best to reconsider your decision? Remember, you poor soul, that in marrying Mr. Goody you bind yourself irrevocably to him until death. No longing, no prayers, will give you back your freedom. Dear, it would be well to pause."

Now he was speaking as she wished.

"Tell me to send him away, and I will do it," she whispered, her blue eyes lifted eagerly to his.

"I dare not take such a responsibility upon myself. Why, in a few years you would tell me I had ruined your life. No, Geraldine, I will only say that a marriage without love is like hell upon earth. Remember my hasty and ill-advised union, and take warning from me."

"I thought you would plead with me to send Mr. Goody away!"

"I have no right to do that; and even had I, why should I bid you play fast-and-loose with an honest and honourable man?"

"Because you love me!" she burst out.

Coldly but gently he set her aside; his face was very weary, and in his eyes there was a silent scorn for this weak, mercenary, unwomanly woman.

"Let it rest," he said, in a low, hard voice. "Why rake up the ashes of a dead love? Forget it, as I have striven to forget."

"But," she cried with tremulous eagerness, "you have not forgotten!" and peered into his dark face, with pain and dismay in her eyes.

"Perhaps it is foolish to say one ever forgets; but, Geraldine, I spoke nothing but the truth when I said mine is a dead love!"

Like Launcelot in Tennyson's superb idyll, he strove to kill her passion by discourtesy; and now she shrank back from him a space, her face white and drawn, her eyes tigerish, her long, slim fingers twisted convulsively together. She strove vainly for speech, her breath came hard and fast; and then, all in a moment, before he could stay her she flung herself on her knees before him, and broke into dreadful, inarticulate wailing.

"Hush! hush!" he entreated, "you will be overheard;" and lifting her up in his arms he laid her upon a couch, and stood looking pitifully down upon her.

She had been the evil genius of his life; she had held him captive since early youth, and he could but grieve for her, although he saw her now as she was, and not as his fancy had painted her.

After a long, long pause, the wretched woman looked up.

"Who is the woman who has supplanted me—for whose sake you are so eager to be off with the old love?"

He made no reply, but his face flushed darkly.

She sat erect and grasped his hand in hers.

"You are throwing me over for that dark-eyed artist; but, thank Heaven, you will never marry her—so long as your wife lives I am avenged."

He held his peace; perhaps just then he dared not speak, and Geraldine, springing up, placed herself before a mirror, and for a few moments regarded her reflection steadily. Then she turned to him,—

"Why have you changed?" she asked in low, slow tones. "Am I less fair than when first we met? Has age stolen the gold from my hair, the light from my eyes? Oh! Duncan, Duncan! say you have been trifling with me!" and once again she grew passionate. "Let me be your servant, your slave—but in the name of mercy do not put me from your heart. Take me away from here—oh! for love's sake, take me away."

He was very full of pity for her then. He held her trembling hands in his and spoke gently, tenderly, to her,—

"My dear, just now you are not yourself. You don't know what you say, or you would shrink back appalled by your own words. You are hysterical, unnerved."

She broke out with a bitter laugh.

"Hysterical! Unnerved! Say rather, Duncan Reeves, that I am a poor woman who has suddenly found herself forsaken; who is crying aloud to Heaven for the compassion you have re-

fused her. False! false! to the heart's core, and I thought you so true."

"Was it just that the faith and love should be all on my side?" he asked, stung at last to anger by her reproaches, so unjustly hurled at him.

"I think it wiser to leave you now before we end our long, long friendship with a deep and bitter quarrel," and he moved to the door. But she followed him, tearful and contrite.

"Forgive me, I think I must be mad; forgive me and kiss me good-bye." She clung about him, and would not let him go. "Duncan," she pleaded, "spare me the pain of seeing you with Miss Phelps—it would tempt me to murder you both."

"I am less than nothing to her," he answered, coldly. "Do not harp upon that string; you persist in forgetting Estrella Reeves."

"Will you go back to her? It would be wiser—you would be safe from temptation."

"Great Heavens! no; and she would not receive me if I did. I don't deserve she should, seeing how I have blighted her life; and, Geraldine, you have forgotten I don't even know where she is."

"True; then you will drift further and further from me, until perhaps we shall cease to know each other—to exchange even formal greetings when we meet at this or that place. Oh, Duncan! Duncan! fate has been very cruel to us."

"No, no;" he urged, with greater common-sense, "we elected our own lots; it is cowardly to shift the blame from our own shoulders. After all, a man is the commander of his own fate to a certain extent."

He heard her mother's step upon the stairs and prepared to leave her. She whispered, hurriedly,—

"Miss Phelps knows of your unhappy union. If she is a good woman she will have nothing to say to you."

"Did you tell her of this?"

"No; are you going? Good-bye; oh, love, love, good-bye!" and, then aloud, for Mrs. Swift's benefit,—

"Thank you so much for your hearty congratulations. I was sure you would be glad to hear of my happiness."

Two minutes later he was out in the sunny street; but upstairs, upon her bed, a woman lay moaning and sobbing out his name, crying out that life was too hard, too hard!

Duncan went at once in the direction of Palace Gardens, where Miss Phelps resided; his heart was full of conflicting passions, his brain busy with many thoughts. But above all his natural pity for Geraldine; above all the anguish and the longing which made his life hard to be borne, was the one desire to be near her for a little while before he said good-bye to her for ever.

A strange yearning to tell her all his miserable story, not excusing himself in anything, nor tucking down his sin until it seemed a venial error, but to tell the plain, unvarnished truth, and throw himself upon her mercy. Strange that, as he went to meet this girl who had so stolen away his heart, his thoughts should so often revert to his girl-wife.

Again, in fancy he heard her soft, sad voice, saw the sweet, melancholy smile on the pale young face; and he felt keener shame, keener regret, for the part he had played, than in the first hours of their separation.

"Poor little soul!" he said, again and again, "I believe that she loved me, and if she should continue faithful to me her life must be a misery to her; though how could it be otherwise, for whilst I live she is bound to me and may not give a thought to any other!"

He reached his destination at last; and was at once shown into the breakfast-room where Estrella and Mrs. Phelps were sitting. He thought the girl had never looked so lovely! She wore a morning gown of peach-coloured cambric embroidered with flowers of a darker shade; delicate laces were about her throat and wrists; and the luxuriant hair was gathered into one careless knot, falling low upon the neck. She blushed a little when Duncan was announced, but

met him with the greatest *sang froid*. He took a chair, and sat down beside her.

"Miss Phelps," he said, "I have come to make a confession."

She smiled brightly up at him.

"Is it a very serious one?"

"Yes," and the gloom on his brow darkened; "and I would make it to none other than yourself. You shall absolve or condemn me."

Mrs. Phelps rose to leave them, but Estrella stayed her by a look.

"What Mr. Reeves may wish to say to me cannot remain a secret to you."

Duncan had scarcely bargained for the presence of a third, but he saw at a glance that the young artist had her reputation to maintain, and in his heart approved her wisdom.

Mrs. Phelps sat down at a distant window, and Duncan drew his chair nearer to the girl.

"I am afraid," he said, suddenly, "I am going to surprise you very much. What would you say if I told you I am a married man?"

"That I knew this long ago," she answered, quietly, but her lips were tremulous, and the colour died a little out of her face. In his soul he cursed himself, fearing he had brought grief to her.

"And where is she?" questioned the girl, after a momentary pause.

"I do not know," he replied, stricken with shame, and afraid to meet the look of those pure young eyes. "We parted four years since."

"Was she a bad woman that you cast her off?"

"No; she was a gentle, innocent creature, and I was a brute!"

"Why did you part?" How low her voice had grown!

"I did not love her; and she discovered that when we had been married something less than two months."

"Poor soul! poor soul! Have you never thought she may be dead? Have you never wished it?"

"Heaven forgive me! sometimes I have!" He glanced at her then.

Her face was ghastly and pinched, her eyes blazed like stars.

"You are sorry for her—for my poor little wife?"

"Yes, oh, yes! my heart bleeds for her! my heart bleeds for her!"

"Have you no pity for me?" he questioned, brokenly and timidly.

She glanced at him a moment and then answered more firmly than she had yet spoken—

"Yes, I am sorry for you, but in a less degree. She has lost her all; you have lost but one friend among many. Ah, poor child! how your coldness bruised her heart! perhaps changed all her good for evil, made her old whilst yet she was young! But why, if you were so indifferent to her, did you marry her?"

"Let me tell you my story from the beginning, and when you know all try and put yourself in my place, and do not blame me too severely for my mercenary action, my harshness to that poor child."

Word by word he related the story Estrella knew so well—not sparing himself, not seeking to hide anything that he had done in the past four years.

He leaned over the girl as he spoke, and saw her colour come and go fitfully, her hands clasp and unclasp nervously; and he said,—

"Tell me what am I to do!"

It was Mrs. Phelps that spoke,—

"Seek out your wife and pray her forgiveness. Strive by tenderness and devotion to teach her forgetfulness of the past four years."

"But, madam," he cried, blankly, "the thought of a lifetime spent with her appals me. She is such a little unformed thing."

"Say was! You forget how long a time has passed since you saw her."

"The thing you suggest is impossible. Miss Phelps, you tell me what I am to do! and then their eyes met, and in hers he read no hope for himself.

"I am not competent to advise you," she answered, in soft, cold tones; "but it seems to

me you should do your best to atone for your error."

He bent so low, and spoke so softly, that she alone could hear his words,—

"Miss Phelps, you have not heard all. I love another woman with all my heart and life!"

"I know this too. She is named Geraldine Swift."

"No, no!" he interrupted, "you are mistaken. Oh, look at me! listen to me one moment! I will find my wife, and discover whether or no I can give her the release we both crave—she as well as I. And if the law grants us this boon, I will go to the woman I love—the hem of whose skirts I am not worthy to touch—and pray her to listen to me, to trust her life to my keeping!"

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!" Estrella said, and her voice had a ring of scorn.

"But if they are best apart! If the law allows their separation!"

"Why, then the woman who is your second choice must act according to her conscience."

"Try to imagine yourself in her place. What would you do?"

"I would say to you, go back to the woman Heaven holds your wife; aye, though I died of love for you, I would not marry you in such a case!"

He rose, pale of lip and brow, but outwardly calm.

"I am answered," he said, heavily, "and being a good woman and pure I am fain to trust to your judgment. I think I shall be leaving England soon. If I decide to do so, may I come once more to say good-bye!" He was holding her hand in his, looking into her eyes.

"Come!" was all she said, and then her voice failed her utterly.

When he was alone he set his face towards the city.

"Now for Lyon," he thought; "he shall tell me if Estrella is alive or dead!"

CHAPTER V.

MR. LYON was unfeignedly surprised when Duncan Reeves walked into his office, and demanded to know where his wife was hidden. This was a turn in affairs he had not anticipated, and he said,—

"If you suppose that I shall put you in the way of persecuting that poor child you are mistaken."

"Then she is alive!" and his heart sank within him.

"Most certainly—alive and well, and lovely as a dream. Now why do you wish to see her? Have you come to your senses at last, young man! I must say you've been rather long about it."

"You are mistaken in your supposition. Even did I wish it, Mrs. Reeves would refuse to return to me. But I am as far from wishing it as she is. I want to consult her, however, on a matter of importance. I would suggest, if such a thing is possible, that our marriage should be annulled."

"That you may marry Miss Swift, I suppose?" Mr. Lyon said, coldly.

"Miss Swift is engaged, I believe, to Mr. Goody. You are rather wide of the mark. But as you are my wife's solicitor, and her chosen champion, perhaps it would be best to tell you all."

"It certainly would," dryly; "as all communications from you must reach her through me. Of course there is a lady you are desirous of putting in her place! Have you forgotten you owe all your present prosperity to Mrs. Reeves?"

"I am scarcely likely to do that; and of course I know I must relinquish all claim to the estates. But I am not afraid to work. And I believe the woman I love would help me to begin my new life. She is the noblest and best of her sex."

"Of course, that goes without saying," Mr. Lyon remarked, coldly. "Is it impertinent to inquire this paragon's name?"

Duncan flushed dusky, but strove not to take offence at the lawyer's tone and manner.

"Understand," he said; "I do not even feel assured that I am more to her than another man (I hope you believe I would not pay court to any woman under my peculiar circumstances). The lady is Miss Phelps, the new violinist."

To his intense surprise and disgust, Mr. Lyon leant back in his chair, and gave vent to a prolonged fit of laughter.

"Oh! dear," he said, recovering his breath and a semblance of composure; "this is too good. My dear fellow, it's useless to fly in a passion, you must bear with me awhile. I must laugh! It is the best joke of the season! Oh! oh! Oh! by Jove, Reeves, you don't mean it!"

Duncan took up his hat.

"When you have recovered your senses, sir, I will see you again. Early as it is, I am inclined to think you have been drinking."

"Stay, Mr. Reeves. If you listen to me a moment you will hardly wonder at my laughter. Things are just as they should be. You have fallen in love with your own wife!"

He laughed again as he saw Duncan's startled face and incredulous eyes.

"That staggers you. Ah! well it may! The girl you despised and disliked as Estrella Reeves you love as Estrella Phelps. We men are a curious breed! We despise what we have and long for what we have not. What are you going to do now? Shall you try to annul the marriage?" and he went off with another exclamation.

"Mr. Lyon, for Heaven's sake, say you are jesting! If she is indeed my wife she will never forgive me. I was brutal to her."

"I quite agree with you. But women are such curious cattle, the more there is to forgive the better they love one. If you want to worm yourself into a woman's affections, do something very wrong and then play at penitence. That is my experience of the sex as learned professionally—not personally."

"But," said Duncan, still bewildered, "Estrella was a little dark creature, pale, unformed, unlovely!"

"She was a child when you married her, she is a woman now. Even at sixteen she gave promise of great beauty. She has fulfilled it. Now, once again, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I am bewildered. I hardly realise yet what you have told me. Mr. Lyon, I have no hope. By my own act I have cut myself off from her. Sometimes she reminded me of my wife. But she is so gloriously lovely, so talented. I was not even aware Estrella was musical."

"Because you never troubled yourself to learn anything about her. I suppose she inherited her talent from her mother. She was an Italian, as you know, and a violinist, as perhaps you did not know. From her earliest years Estrella had a penchant for the instrument. And when your harshness drove her to a desperate step, she placed herself under great masters, and devoted herself, heart and soul, to her art, intending by her own efforts to make herself famous, and nobly has she succeeded."

The lawyer had grown grave now. He laid his hand upon Duncan's shoulders, and looked steadily into his eyes.

"I believe you mean well and honestly, and I wish you good luck. If I may presume to advise, I should say to Estrella at once and plead your own cause. Make her listen to you. My boy! this is as it should be, and let all your after life prove the sincerity of your remorse and your love."

"But, sir—if she will not forgive!"

"Tush! Don't attempt anything with a faint heart; or you will fail," and he gently pushed Duncan from the office. "Carry my love to Estrella, and tell her to be good."

Out in the street, Duncan paused and endeavoured to regain some of his lost composure, some clearness of thought.

His heart beat fast and hard. Perhaps in all his life he had never been so agitated or so fearful.

He had stoned so sorely against Estrella that he dared hardly hope for forgiveness, and still less dared he believe that she could ever feel any

tenderness for him. And he loved her so passionately; life without her now would be a terrible thing.

Well, he would go to her; he would plead humbly and earnestly for pardon and love. He would think no sacrifice too hard, no labour that she might impose too great, to prove his sincerity.

He did not forget, for a moment, that he had no longer a helpless, trustful child to deal with; but a much wronged woman, who had learned self-confidence in a very hard and bitter school.

He had done his best to break her heart and spoil her life. He had trampled her love and tenderness ruthlessly under foot. He had given her a very bitter cup to drink—had had no pity upon her youth, her loneliness.

No, there could be no hope for him. And with that thought he went miserably to his chambers.

But the following morning he rose in a brighter mood; and, dressing carefully, started for Estrella's residence. To his joy he found her sitting alone, Mrs. Phelps being confined to her room with a severe headache.

The girl rose as he entered; she was somewhat paler than usual, a little colder and prouder in manner; but she gave him her hand. He held it close and fast, although she strove to withdraw it from his clasp.

"Estrella!" he said, hoarsely; and then she knew he had learned all.

Every vestige of colour left the beautiful face, and into the dark eyes came a look of indomitable pride and gathering coldness. In that moment she looked strangely like the girl-wife who had said so passionately—"I will never forgive you!"

His heart began to fail him, but he would not let her go without a struggle.

"Wife, wife!" he said; "it was but yesterday I learned the truth, the blessed truth, which gives me the woman I love for my own. Estrella, my darling heart, is it quite impossible to forgive the wrong I did you long ago? Dear, I sinned and lost you. Now bid me do whatever penance you can devise if only in the end I may claim you, field you mine for all time. Punish me as you will, but let me hope—sweet, and dear—let me hope!"

She wrenched her hand from his then, and faced him, stern as an accusing angel.

"Duncan Reeves," she said, "it is not your wife you love, but another; and how shall I tell that you will not weary of the new love as you did of the old? When my beauty and the novelty of my presence had worn away, what would hold your fickle heart to me? Long ago, by your own act, you worked out our separation. I left you broken-hearted—I freely gave up all that was mine by inheritance. I never troubled your peace—I was as one dead to you. Why have you recalled me to life? How dare you ask me for love and pity—you, who had neither for me—for the helpless, lonely child who had believed in you, loved you, worshipped you?"

"I had none," he answered, brokenly; "but I repent. What can a man do further? You will say my repentance is a mere empty form of words. Try me, judge me by my actions."

"If you had treated me kindly and considerately in the past," she said, "there would be no need now to plead with me. I should have been your slave. I should have clung to you in and through all that you would not have this."

"Remember," he urged, "all that you promised me beside your father's bed; and only yesterday you quoted for my benefit the words, 'Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'"

"I know, I know," wildly; "but you yourself made our marriage null and void. Oh! do not delude yourself with the belief that I ever can, or ever will forgive."

"Think of what my life will be without you," he urged, desperately. "Think of what the years will be, cut off from love and all good things."

"I have chosen my lot, I shall not shrink from it. As for you, well, you have worked your own undoing. Yet this is the hour I longed for—the hour of your defeat and my triumph. I shall

look back to it through all the long years to come and find consolation in it."

"You are sorely unforgiving," he said in a heartbroken way, and his eyes dwelt miserably upon the sweet, proud face.

"I am what you have made me," she answered, coldly. "Why do you complain of your handiwork? Oh, once—it is so long since I almost distrust my own memory—once I was a simple, loving child—so proud to be your chosen wife, so glad in your affection, so sure and so exultant in your integrity and truth, that I fancied myself blessed above all others of my sex. The awakening was very bitter; all my passion was thrown scornfully back upon me, all my trust shaken, and my pride outraged. Oh! how changed I am! With what different eyes I see you now. Duncan! Duncan! you were very cruel to me," and then her voice was shaken and piteous.

He thought she was relenting and broke out eagerly,—

"Estrella, whatever you may say to the contrary, I believe you love me still."

She regained her haughty manner at once.

"Have you yet to learn one often despises the creature one loves? I weighed you in the balance and found you wanting. Be content with my decision; it will never change. Do you suppose for an instant that I would share your affection with such a woman as Geraldine Swift?"

"She is less than nothing to me now."

"As I should be in the course of a few years; being unattainable, you long for me. Surely I have said enough to prove that between us there can be no union, no forgiveness?"

"I still cling to my forlorn hope, Estrella; you will scarcely blame me for that. Oh, wife! my darling wife! with you beside me I would make my life worthier and better. I would labour to win your approval, to crown you with honours. Don't cast me aside when most I feel my need of you. Love! love! can you find no kind word to say?"

A spasm of pain twitched about her mouth, but her manner lost nothing of its firmness.

"I can and do send you away, because I cannot trust you or forgive."

"To err is human, to forgive divine."

"Some sins are beyond pardon," she answered, coldly.

"You are but prolonging your own pain, and forcing me to say harsh things. Why will you not accept 'no' as my answer to your entreaties? I wish, for your sake, I may be cut off in the midst of my youth and my fame. I should be glad to feel that you were free. A man's wounds heal so quickly, one love succeeds another so soon. It is only women who are faithful even when heart and sense alike rebel against such constancy."

Then there was silence between them for awhile—silence so profound that she could hear his deep-drawn breaths. She felt mad with her misery, but her pride sustained her even then, and she shed no tear, made no moan.

"Good-bye," he said at last, in a changed and husky voice. "I shall trouble you no more."

You are a sweet and good woman, but you lack one virtue. Were you merciful you would be perfect. But I do not seek to reproach you. Heaven knows I have small right to do that; if you could have forgotten, if you could have trusted me, I should have thanked you all my life long. But you have chosen. Well, let us part, and as I am leaving you for ever, as the mere fact that I am your husband allows me some privilege, I pray you let me kiss you once."

Just so had she pleaded to him once, and he had denied her one caress. Did she remember it now?

If so she made no sign, as she lifted her face to meet his. He felt her warm soft breath fluttering amongst his waving hair, and as he drew her close in the last passionate, hopeless farewell, he felt her heart beating upon his, and broke into a bitter groan, realising in a flash all that he had lost—all that he must yearn for with such terrible sick longing through the dreary days before him.

He rained wild kisses on her throat, her cheeks, her lips; then, with sudden remembrance, he put her gently away.

"Good-bye," he said again "may your life

be as bright as mine is dark; may you never regret this hour or this hour's work. Oh! love! love! love! I wonder will you ever relent?"

She could not bear to see the awful anguish in his eyes, the hopeless expression on his handsome face; she put up her hands as if to shut out the sight.

He moved to the door and then he paused, and looked back as one looks on the faces of the dear dead; such despair—such longing in his glance as might well melt her woman's heart. Then he went out and shut the door behind him.

Estrella lay silent upon the couch, listening to the hurrying steps of passers-by, trying vainly to distinguish his from amongst them.

Slowly, heavily, he went back to his chambers, locking the door upon intruders. He took his life in his hands and faced it in all its hideous loneliness and lovelessness; he did not shrink or cry out with horror, as he saw each day darker, more dreary than its predecessor.

He excused nothing in his past, he hoped for nothing in the future. Well, then, let him do what he could to make some other lives brighter, better, happier, something that would purify his name to her, that would incline her to think more pitifully of his wrong-doing.

Adversity was doing for him what prosperity had failed to do. It was refining his dress, bringing out whatever dormant good there had been in him. Heaven knows his thirty years had been worse than wasted; but Heaven is merciful, and although Duncan did not hope it, there were good times yet in store for him.

Left to herself, Estrella had broken into wild wallings and tears; she had cried until her strength was spent, and her head ached so madly it was pain to think.

In the evening Mr. Lyon visited her.

"I have seen Reeves," he said, abruptly, and a faint flush stained the pallor of her face. She made no answer and he went on, "Were you mad to send him away hopeless?"

"No; I only did not forget," she answered, wearily.

"You must be mad, or your fame is spoiling you. He is your husband, and you should let bygones be bygones."

"It is useless to plead for him. My resolve is a fixed one," and she would say no more.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL the fashionable world was electrified when it heard that Duncan Reeves had given the whole of his splendid fortune up to his wife, had removed from his chambers, and was subsisting somewhere on his original income of three hundred per annum.

Speculation was rife as to where his wife was hidden, and what had caused this sudden quixotic action on his part.

The malicious said that for four years he had been unjustly using and enjoying her property, but now, having attained her majority, she was asserting her rights.

No one guessed the truth, not even Estrella herself; she supposed at first he had left England for a time, and was not a little surprised when Mr. Lyon told her he was still in town.

"I wish to hear nothing," she said coldly; "we are dead to each other."

"One day," the lawyer said, "you will be sorry for and ashamed of your conduct; it is unchristian and unwomanly."

"Then even you turn against me! Are you all on his side?"

"I don't believe in kicking a man when he's down; that is not English."

"It never struck me that you were partial to Mr. Reeves," she remarked, ignoring his last words; "this is a new experience."

"My dear girl, I had as fine a contempt for him as even you could wish, but lately my opinions have become modified concerning him, and I maintain you are using him very ill."

"Have I not been used ill?" she questioned, in a suppressed tone.

"I'm not going to deny that, but now you have the chance of happiness you throw it aside to gratify your pride. To my mind you were vastly nicer when you were a little unformed thing than you are now. You were hot-tempered, it is true, but generous and quick to forgive. It strikes me forcibly you are being spoiled by your success; you are growing hard, and sorely unforgiving."

"Perhaps I am," she answered wearily, "but you who know my story should not blame me overmuch. Oh! Mr. Lyon I loved him once above and beyond all creatures. I made him my idol, and fell down and worshipped him. I would not see the feet of clay, I would not heed little signs and tokens, which went to prove him like other men. If he had demanded my life I should have given it freely, glad to do him service; but he killed all that was good in me, and now if I would forgive, I could not. Oh! friend, dear old friend, is not my case pitiable! Am I to bear all the blame, and he to have all the commendation? It is not just—it is not just."

He did not attempt to reason with her; he was sorry for, but impatient with her, and was glad when the season closed, and she left town to fulfil a round of provincial engagements.

Meantime, where was Duncan Reeves?

He had taken apartments in that unsavoury region known as Whitechapel, and began a good work among the thronging poor.

He was not a religious man, and he had been fastidious; but he wanted work, and one long day spent in this neighbourhood had opened his eyes to the manifold wants and distresses of his poorer brethren. Here, amongst them, the scholar and the gentleman would hide away from all who had known him, would fill his days with labour, and perhaps be not altogether unhappy. He began to visit from house to house, and gradually the *bravuerie* with which he had been greeted at first wore away; he was no longer regarded with suspicion, and went in and out the houses as he pleased. He had a word of kindly advice always ready; a word of warning for the unwary. He bade them see in him a man who had wantonly wrecked his own life; he was always ready to share his income with them, to help them with their burdens. His dark, worn face grew familiar to the denizens of noisome courts and alleys, his kindly voice the only music heard there.

He was often weary, often sick at heart, but they never knew this, never heard him complain.

There were times when he was mad with his love and misery, when it seemed so useless to struggle against fate that he was inclined to throw down his arms in despair. But if his days were dark his nights were infinitely worse. Shut up in his own room, he would sit brooding over the fire, seeing in the glowing embers visions of what might have been; or he would pore over a book from whose pages Estrella's face looked up at him, dark with passion and indomitable pride. Then he would turn away with a groaning, and stretching out his arms murmur her name in a terrible, heartbroken way. He was so hopeless of winning her to him, of touching that proud spirit to pity. And when the lights were out, and he lay tossing on his bed, she came and stood beside him, stern and silent, an accusing angel, with loveliest, proudest face. Even his dreams were haunted by her, and had one listened one would have heard him mutter often in his broken sleep "Oh, wife! wife!" in the accents of one who has foregone hope.

Autumn and winter passed, and spring came; since his voluntary flight from old scenes, old friends, old associations, he had never ventured into the more aristocratic parts of the city—the old ways would seem strange to him now.

He heard from Mr. Lyon, who occasionally visited him, that Estrella had returned, and the longing to see her again came upon him with overwhelming force.

One night he walked in the direction of her house—the old one—for she had refused to publish her marriage, or take possession of the home he had prepared for her long ago.

He had hoped to catch a glimpse of her beautiful face, but he was disappointed bitterly. The

blinds were all drawn, he could hear the sound of music and laughter, but he could not distinguish her voice.

The following night he was there again, and this time he was most fortunate. Just as he reached the house the door opened, and Estrella, followed by Mrs. Phelps, came out, dressed for a concert. She passed him so closely that her skirts almost brushed him, and her voice, low and soft, said,—

"I must excel myself to-night as Royalty will be present."

Then she stepped into the carriage and was driven away, so unconscious of his presence, so seemingly careless of his love, that he began to believe her happy.

Often and often after that he was near her at night, breathing her name so lowly that none but himself could hear the soft, sweet word.

Long, long afterwards, when she heard the tale of his woes, she hated herself for her harshness and pride, and the glory of her eyes was dimmed by tears she shed for him. But now how could she guess that his love was around and about her as a mantle; that for her sake he bore his burden day after day, never fainting, never falling, so long as his physical strength endured!

And so, in this wise, another year passed, another season began, and Mr. Lyon saw with grave anxiety that Duncan's face grew daily more wan, his step more slow, and he said angrily to himself, "He is simply dying for love of her, and forgot that men do not die of love."

"Estrella, I want to have five minutes' chat with you," said Mr. Lyon, walking into her pretty breakfast-room one morning.

"You may have fifty if you choose. I am quite at liberty for three hours to come. Why, you look as grave as a judge. What has happened! Are you going to be married! Am I to wish you happiness?"

She had acquired a certain flippant way of jesting of late, and it jarred upon the lawyer horribly; so he said, sharply,—

"If you can give me grave and close attention for a few minutes I shall be glad; I came to speak of Duncan Reeves."

She interrupted him swiftly,—

"That is a tabooed subject."

"I am well aware of that," coolly; "and I know, too, you are only accustomed to compliments and flattery. Well, I am going to administer a wholesome tonic, for I shall speak plainly, as your father would have done had he lived."

Something in his manner compelled her to obey, and she sat down with lightly folded hands, listening with apparent calmness as he told the story of Duncan's life and Duncan's work. She could not help feeling a little glad in him; but pride prevented her showing this, and when Mr. Lyon paused, she said,—

"And what does all this amount to? What does it prove? Did he engage you as his ambassador! If so, go back and say that he has not furthered his cause by so doing."

"You are as obstinate as a mule, as cruel as a Borgia, as proud as Lucifer. I am disgusted with, and disappointed in you. I believed you to be kind and womanly—"

"Sir," she interrupted, "spare yourself the trouble of reasoning with me. You should remember," smiling coldly, "the old saying:—"

"He that complains against his will, is of his own opinion still."

Mr. Lyon frowned upon her.

"Pray hear me to the end, and then have me ejected if you will. Is it good policy to cut yourself off from old and tried friends?"

"I will not interrupt again," she answered, carelessly, and sat looking from the window; and Mr. Lyon, in his turn, looked at her curiously.

"I suppose," he said, "if Mr. Reeves were ill—dying—you would carry your animosity still further, and refuse to go to him?"

"Why will you suppose such things? Please come to the point."

"That is what I intend doing. I have come in

your husband's interests, and I can hardly believe you will be so unwomanly as to hold out longer when you have heard all. A fortnight since his philanthropy had carried him in the direction of the Docks. He was walking along, buried in thought, when he heard a sudden splash, followed by shouts, and, turning hastily, saw a woman struggling in the water. The people on the bank seemed paralysed by fear, and had he not plunged in after her she must have been drowned. Well," with a queer glance at Estrella, "I suppose his heroism counts for nothing! The woman was only a poor unfortunate whom nobody cared about, and who had thrown herself in, in the hope of getting rid of her troubles. With great difficulty Duncan succeeded in drawing her to the bank, and being assisted there himself lay long in a swoon. He had been ailing some weeks, and had been advised to take some rest—had even been warned that his life was in danger. But why should he care to live! He had few friends; his wife wished for freedom, he was weary and heart sick, and so he had disregarded the advice."

The colour left Estrella's face, and the proud lips had grown tremulous. Suddenly she turned, and her eyes full of love and pain met Mr. Lyon's. But he had a mission to accomplish, and went on ruthlessly,—

"Well, he returned to his lodgings—poor apartments in Whitechapel—he who had been used to luxury always. And then—well, then a fever ensued, and no friend was near him. The poor women of the neighbourhood vied with each other in attending him, but they were ignorant, and so—"

"Oh, do not add he died!" Estrella cried suddenly, in an awful voice. "Oh, kind friend, oh, dear friend! have some pity upon me! I love him! I love him! Oh, take me to him! If he is dead Heaven will not forgive me my cruelty. Oh, you cannot tell how hard I have been—and yet through all I have longed for him, have loved him!" She fell on her knees beside her friend, and hid her face from him.

"Estrella," he said, gently, "I am here to take you to him. You have been cruel, but I will not reproach you now. Get your hat and come with me. The fever has left him, child; but the medical men say unless something occurs to rouse him from his lethargy his days are numbered."

"Oh! take me to him," she sobbed. "I have been sorely unforgiving; but he is good, and perhaps will find it in his heart to pity me."

It was growing dark when they entered the house and groped their way up the narrow stairs; on the landing Estrella stumbled over a dark object. It proved to be a boy, who, sitting erect, sobbed out,—

"Oh, let me—let me be! I can't go away till I know he's better. Oh, Heaven! oh, Heaven! he's the only friend I've got, and they say he's dyin'! Let me see him just a minute, mum, only a little minute; he was kind to me when nobody else gave me anythin' but kicks and curses."

"Hush, hush, my boy!" said Mr. Lyon, imperatively. "You will disturb him; come, be brave, and you shall see him soon. This lady has come to nurse him back to health."

Then he opened the door, and Estrella went in alone. A moment she stood looking on the still form upon the bed—the pale, worn face, paler by contrast with the dark hair and lashes. Then she moved forward, an awful fear tearing at her heart.

ST. JACOBS OIL FOR CRAMP.

MR J. FINCHAM, of Witteputs Sidings, Herbert, G. W., Cape Colony, South Africa, writes to us as follows:—

"I have suffered for the last two months with cramp intensely in both my legs. I tried everything that was recommended to me, but without success, until I used St. Jacobs Oil, and I am happy to say that after I had used the contents of three bottles I have never been troubled with cramp pains."

"Duncan," she murmured, "Duncan, my love, my husband!"

Slowly the heavy lids uplifted, the dark grey eyes rested upon her, then a faint voice said,—

"Oh, my darling!—my darling! you have come at last!"

In a moment he was in her arms, clasped close and fast, whilst her tears fell on his pallid face, but they were tears of thankfulness and joy.

Did Duncan live! And if so, was he happy!

Read an extract from a letter to Mr. Lyon, written long afterwards:—

"This present joy is worth all past pain. My wife is an angel, and I wonder often at the blindness which made me turn from her and cling to a worthless woman. We are happy in our present mode of life, and our home for destitute women and children goes on famously. Come down and see it and us. If you reach here by the ninth you will be in time for the christening. The little one is to be called 'Douglas Lyon.'—Yours always, "DUNCAN REEVES."

[THE END.]

FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

ATONEMENT.

CLARICE rose from her knees and resumed her former place on the couch, conscious of a curious thrill equally compounded of curiosity and apprehension. The effect this woman had upon her was a strange one, and even she herself hardly understood it; for while on the one hand she undoubtedly fascinated her, there was, nevertheless, always an undercurrent of another feeling, which might almost be described as fear, and which constantly made itself felt in their intercourse.

For a few minutes the elder woman did not speak, but remained with her tragic eyes fixed on the floor, then she seemed to rouse herself from the reverie into which she had fallen, and began,—

"I need hardly tell you I have gipsy blood in my veins, for you have, doubtless, discovered that for yourself long ago; and as I go on with my story, you will see further signs of my origin. My own mother was a gipsy pure and simple, who fascinated my father to much by her beauty that he married her. She died while I was a baby, and afterwards I was sent to school as I was found to be unmanageable at home, but I ran away and joined a troupe of gipsies, amongst whom were several of my mother's relatives, and with them I remained for some years, my father being at that time with his regiment in India. When he returned to Europe I had to go and live with him, and then I married. The name of my husband was Lennox Craven."

She paused for a moment to watch the effect of this announcement on her listener. Clarice's expression changed rapidly, and she repeated the name below her breath.

"Then," she said, in a low voice, "you are my husband's mother."

"His mother. Yes, that is my confession, and by the light of it you will be able to read many things that have puzzled you in the past. Lennox was my only child—the centre of all my ambitions—the hope of my existence. For his father had been taken away from me a few months after our marriage—struck down by the hand of a noted duellist, whose fame as a swordsman was acknowledged all over Europe; and I brought my boy up with this object always in view—that he must avenge his father's death." Her eyes grew fierce as she was speaking, and she clasped her hands together so tightly that the nails dug into the flesh.

"For this purpose I made him perfect himself in swordsmanship, and I would not even tell him the name of his enemy until I decided he was a fencer skilful enough to meet him.

"In the meantime, the gipsy blood in Lennox betrayed itself in his desire to travel and see strange places. He was brave, and strong, and fearless, and cared little what risks he ran; so that he soon became known as a daring explorer, without whom no expedition would be complete. It was like shedding my heart's blood to part with him then, but I let him go, well knowing that it would strain my authority over him to its furthest limits if I were to endeavour to keep him with me. And, unknown to him, I followed him in many of these expeditions, and so to speak, kept guard over him.

"I adopted different disguises, and my gipsy training stood me in good stead. Many a time have I stood between him and danger without his ever suspecting it; but once he had me at bay, and would not let me go until I had told him my name. So I said I was El Yaldour—the wanderer."

"Then," exclaimed Clarice, excitedly, "it was you who appeared to us in the Rose Garden, before I was married!"

"Yes, in the vain endeavour to warn him against letting himself love you," was the bitter reply. "It was of no avail, I might as well have spoken to the winds. But you were the one woman denied to him, and so you were the only one he desired."

"Then," the young girl added, trembling, "you know the secret of my father's death!"

"Ay—better than anyone else, except one person only. Clarice, it is, time you knew the truth. Your husband is innocent of your father's blood. He went to Sunningdale, it is true, with the intention of killing him in fair fight, but Fate interfered. Sir Alvick Chandos' death does not lie at Lennox Craven's door."

Clarice stared at her for a moment with wide open eyes, before she clearly understood the whole sense and meaning of the words, then she fell on her knees, and raised her hands with a deep sob of utter thankfulness.

"Thank Heaven, oh, thank Heaven for its mercy!"

It was some minutes before Clarice regained calmness, but when she did she signed eagerly to her companion to resume her story—a request that was at once obeyed.

"You shall learn the true history of that night. Your father was the man who had killed my husband in a duel, and on the anniversary of his death, Lennox went to Sunningdale Court to challenge him to fight once more—with the son this time. He had no alternative but to comply, but knowing the probable result of the duel, he asked for half an hour in which to put his affairs in order, and Lennox granted the request. It was during that half-hour that he rescued you from the bridge across to the Tower. I was witness to the latter part of the scene, for I had come to the Court by means of a small canoe, from the gipsy encampment where I was then staying. I watched Lennox carrying you through the window into the Court, and a few minutes later I saw a woman stealing quietly along in the shadow and crease to the Tower. Of course she found the door locked on the outside, but the key was in the lock, so she was able to effect an entrance. I followed almost immediately, for her presence threatened my plans, and I wanted to find out who she was. The inner door of the Tower was ajar, and standing close to it I was enabled to hear all that passed inside. Sir Alvick was telling his companion that he was in danger, and must leave the Tower immediately, but she evidently stood in his way to prevent him, and angrily demanded some document which he refused to give her. In the altercation that ensued I heard him say, 'I will never acknowledge your claim upon me—never as long as I live,' and then, in a mad access of passion she must have stabbed him, for directly afterwards there was a heavy thud as his body fell forward. It was a horrible sound,"—she shuddered as she spoke—"and I hesitated what I should do. Before I decided, the door opened and the woman came out, her face and shoulders enveloped in a woollen shawl that entirely concealed them. I drew back and she did not see me, but I noticed in her hand a paper which she

clutched tightly, and which I judged she had taken from Sir Alvick's body, as he lay dead at her feet. After she had disappeared I entered the study, not," she added, sternly, "on any errand of mercy, but simply to assure myself that he was really dead."

"Hush!" murmured Clarice, imploringly, "remember, he was my father."

"He was your father, but he was a cruel man who wrecked my life, and who was justly punished for his misdeeds. When I left the study the clock outside was striking, and I concealed myself in some shrubs until after Lennox left the Court. I saw him go to the Tower, and there he learned for himself what had happened. When he came out he had in his hand the sword with which he had intended fighting a duel with Sir Alvick, and which he afterwards threw away in the pond."

"He joined me, and I could see his nerves were terribly upset. Possibly, he imagined mine was the hand that had struck the fatal blow, and he hurried me away to the canoe that was waiting for us. Then I told him that it was not I who had committed the crime, and his relief was great."

"I was then wearing my convent dress and he supposed I had only just come from Italy, and intended returning the next day. It was not until twelve months later that he met you at Falfax Park, and fell madly in love with you."

"That was the turning point in his career. Do you remember that evening in the Rose Garden, when, as El Yaldour, I warned him against thinking of marriage with you? He did not heed me, dominated as he was by his overwhelming passion, and that same night an accident happened to me."

"I fell over a stone and struck my head so violently that concussion of the brain resulted. For some weeks I was very ill, and the first news I learned after my convalescence was that Lennox's wedding-day was fixed, and he had bought Hurst Royal as a future home."

"I was in despair. That my son should marry Sir Alvick Chandos' daughter seemed to me horrible, and even at the eleventh hour I resolved to make a final effort to part you."

"Accordingly, I came down to Greyfriars, whose history was well known to me, and made certain arrangements which resulted in an accident to your carriage just outside the gates."

"You I saw in my gipsy disguise; but I changed it for my interview with Lennox, and put on my convent robes, telling him I had journeyed from Italy for the express purpose of opposing his marriage with you."

"He said it was too late. The marriage was already an accomplished fact, and his love for you was great enough to overcome all difficulties that had stood in the way. The sins of the fathers should not, he declared, be visited on the children."

"I saw then how completely he was under the dominion of his passion, and the knowledge of it enraged me beyond endurance. I told him the stain of blood lay between you; but he answered that Sir Alvick's crime had been wiped out by his death at a stranger's hand."

"Then I played my last and boldest card. You will despise me, Clarice, for the lie; but my resolve was to part you, let what would betide. I told Lennox that I had deceived him on the night of the murder, and that I myself had killed Sir Alvick."

She paused, and Clarice started back with a low cry of horror and shrinking. A minute later she raised her head, a swift change coming over her face, which was aflame with eagerness.

"I understand it all now. Lennox was innocent of the crime; but for your sake he kept silence, and allowed himself to be branded as a murderer."

"Yes. He knew he could not clear himself without betraying me, and to do that would have been to be false to his whole nature. When I made my confession to him he was horribly distressed and torn with doubt as to what he should do, but finally his resolve was to cling to you—his wife. Nothing could wipe out the wrong that had been done, he said, and nothing could undo the marriage; but he would keep the truth

from you, and at least try and secure your happiness."

"And I in return wrecked his!" cried Clarice, with bitter remorse.

"You need not blame yourself for that. You did what you believed to be right, and I honour you for it. Yes, I honoured you for it at the time, though I tried to persuade myself that I hated you as well. All the while you were at Hurst Royal I kept myself well acquainted with your doings—I was even aware of a certain interview that took place between you and Lennox one morning when you chanced to find the revolver he had taken from your father and the wig he had worn the night he went to Sunningdale Court. It struck me these things would compromise him if they were found, so I myself took them away."

"Were you in the house then?"

"I got in, by means of a light rope ladder that I have often found useful," was the reply, spoken with a slight smile. "And when, afterwards, following the visits of Paice the detective, I discovered that Lennox had left hastily for London, and intended going abroad, I guessed what had happened. However, I followed him to town, and made him tell me why he was leaving England. Even then I was tempted to confess the truth to him, but the remembrance of your father's sin against me hardened my heart, and I let him go without a word. You see I do not attempt to excuse myself. I am willing to take the responsibility for my actions."

She held herself erect with a movement of imperious hauteur, as though challenging denial, but Clarice was silent. She could not, at this moment, find it in her heart to utter gentle words to one who had wrought so much misery.

"I saw Lennox for the last time as he went on board," she continued, presently, "and by some strange freak of Fate, after he had said 'good-bye' to me, he came back, and said 'Guard my wife while I am away. There is no one to look after her, and shield her from harm, and I know you can find the means if you only have the will. She at least is shrewd, and she bears my name. I commend her to your protection. If evil befall her, I shall look to you to answer for it.' They were strange words—strange and unexpected—but they had the effect he must have foreseen. I felt you were indeed a sacred charge left to me by him, and I resolved to fulfil it. Whether I have done so, I leave you to judge. I have at least tried my best, and it was for this reason that I determined to make my home at Greyfriars so as to be near you. Heaven knows I tried hard all through to keep up my hatred of you, but after all, I am but human, and your gentleness, your youth, your beauty, and your helplessness all combined to soften me. Shall I confess it Clarice—I have grown to love you, and to look upon you, not as my enemy's child, but as my son's wife, and therefore my child?" Her voice quivered a little as she laid her hand on the girl's shining head. "It is that which has induced me to acknowledge the truth, in the hope that the wrong may be righted, and the past redeemed. Have I made atonement, Clarice?"

The girl shook her head sadly.

"There can be no atonement while Lennox is an outcast," she said.

CHAPTER XXVIII. AND LAST.

ONCE more the Chandos Case was on every lip, and indeed its sensational developments were strange and exciting enough not only to fill the newspapers, but to engage public attention generally. Miss Sybil Chandos—the handsome heiress whose romantic inheritance of her half-sister's fortune was still fresh in everyone's memory—had been arrested charged with the murder of her own father, and Clarice Craven, whose body had been so mysteriously spirited away last December, was proved not to have died at all, although an attempt had been made to poison her by means of lead, obtained from certain cosmetics which Sir Colin Middlemore had procured at the request of his fiancée.

Middlemore, to do him justice, was as much surprised and horrified as other people, for he

had had the prescription given him by Sybil made up, in perfect innocence of its purpose, fully believing that she intended using it as a wash for her complexion.

Sybil, when brought before the magistrates, and charged with the murder of Sir Alrick Chandos, strenuously denied her guilt, but when a lady who had been sitting in the well of the court stood up, and throwing back the thick veil that had concealed her features, revealed the face of Clarice Craven, a sudden and terrible change came over her. Incredulity struggled with horror, and a convulsive shudder shook her from head to foot. It is likely enough that her nerves, already strained to the utmost, were unable to stand the extra tension of looking on the features of the girl she had tried her best to poison, and perhaps, unaware of the true reason of Clarice's presence, she put it down to a supernatural origin. With a wild shriek of terror she covered her eyes with her hands.

"Take her away—oh, for Heaven's sake take her away!" she screamed. "I will confess everything—everything, if you will only take her away."

She fell back fainting, and was carried out in an unconscious condition, while Clarice, whose own nerves were also terribly shaken, vehemently declared that she would take no proceedings against the wretched woman for what she had done as regards herself.

"If, as I believe, she really tried to take my life for the sake of inheriting my wealth, I will leave it to her own conscience to punish her," the young girl said. "It is true she has sinned, but she has also been sinned against. She never knew a parent's love, nor the peace of a home. From her babyhood she has been at a school where she had to fight her own battles, and if in the struggle she has become hard and callous, mine ought not to be the hand to cast a stone at her."

As to the story of her own abduction—for it really amounted to that—Clarice was anxious to say as little as possible, still, a certain amount of explanation had to be given, and it leaked out that her husband's mother had taken her to Greyfriars, and there nursed her through a very dangerous illness from which she had but just recovered, and which had threatened not only her life but her reason. Happily, she was now quite well again, and able to take up the tangled threads of her life.

Her first inquiry had been to prove whether Sybil really was her half-sister, and an interview with Mr. Marlowe had at once set at rest all doubts on this point. The lawyer said truly he had been very loath to admit Miss Marsh's claim, but investigation had proved that her mother was legally married to Sir Alrick Chandos, who, however, had been at great pains to keep the fact secret. Even when he admitted Sybil into his household at Sunningdale Court, he had not hinted to her the relationship subsisting between them, which she, nevertheless, had suspected from the first, and finally proved. It was a strange coincidence that she should have selected that fatal first of May to try and wring from him a confession of her legitimacy.

And now, for the benefit of the reader, it will be as well to go back a little, and briefly narrate how Paice had obtained the knowledge which led to the final dénouement at Hurst Royal, when, armed with a search warrant, he had effected Sybil Marsh's arrest.

Shocked as he had been the previous December on being met with the news of Clarice's supposed death, he did not give up his purpose of unravelling the secret of the Chandos murder, for there was still the reward of one hundred pounds waiting to be claimed, and now that the detective had convinced himself of Lennox Craven's innocence, there was no motive for holding back. He had to wait patiently until Hester Somes was well enough to be interviewed, and directly this was possible he cross-questioned her very closely with regard to all she knew concerning the tragedy. This, at first, did not appear to be more than she had already told Dr. Hartland, but later on she added one or two more details which had appeared unimportant to her, but concerning which the detective formed a different opinion.

For instance, on the day following the murder, she had noticed on Miss Marsh's dress-slipper traces of small gravel which had not been there the morning before, and which pointed to the fact of Sybil having crossed the terrace the previous evening.

Also, in the pocket of the black gown usually worn by Sybil as a dinner dress, she had observed two small, roundish holes which looked as if they had been pierced with some double-pointed instrument, and these holes were stained with blood.

"It is quite on the cards that these holes were made by the compasses, and if so, Miss Marsh probably has those compasses still in her possession, for as no mention was made of them at the inquest, she would not suspect how incriminating they were," Paice said to himself, shrewdly, and he decided to follow up this fresh clue, hoping in the meanwhile to come upon some traces of the mysterious woman with the black veil, who had spoken those strange words to Lennox Craven in the hearing of Hester Somes.

Paice's plan now was to obtain a place for Hester in the household of Hurst Royal, and thus keep a watch upon Sybil, and this, as we know, he finally succeeded in doing, with the result of finding that Sybil always wore round her neck the key of the brass-bound coffer which was locked up in her wardrobe, but which Hester had seen when going to the wardrobe for the purpose of getting her mistress's dresses out. In this coffer Paice decided he would find the compasses—that is to say, if he was right in his surmises. And events, as we know, proved that in this instance he was right. At the same time it is likely enough that he might not have succeeded in obtaining the search warrant but for the help he received from an unexpected quarter—none other than El Yaldour himself.

This woman, who was not without her own sources of information in the Hurst Royal household, soon discovered the purpose for which Hester Somes was there, and as she had revealed everything to Clarice, there was every reason why she should wish the real murderess of Sir Alrick Chandos brought to justice.

Accordingly, after consulting with Clarice, she communicated with Paice, and told him what she had witnessed and overheard in the tower at Sunningdale, thus completing the chain of evidence that he had so industriously woven. Clarice herself supplied the last link, inasmuch as she remembered, when she recovered from the fainting fit into which she had fallen after her somnambulist adventure, she had heard the sound of breathing near her, and the rustle of a dress, which she was now convinced was that of Sybil's on her way back to her room.

Armed with these witnesses, Paice had no difficulty in procuring authority to search Hurst Royal, and there seemed little doubt that Sybil Marsh's guilt would be conclusively established. Clarice, though she declined to have anything more to do with the prosecution of the accused woman, was powerless to prevent the law from taking its course, but on the day following that on which she was brought before the magistrates—which was to have been her wedding-day—Sybil made a desperate effort to solve the problem confronting her.

With a small penknife she had concealed on her person, she opened one of her veins, and had nearly bled to death before her condition was discovered. A doctor was soon in attendance, but he could do little for her, and Clarice was at once communicated with as she was the only known relative of the dying woman. Needless to say she was quickly there, and kneeling on the stone floor, with Sybil's cold fingers clasped in hers, she implored mercy for the erring soul so swiftly going to its last account.

Sybil made an effort to snatch her hand away, but Clarice only held it the tighter. For three hours they remained thus, the dying woman uttering no sound, while the younger girl never ceased her prayers. At last, in a whisper, Sybil said, bitterly,—

"You are wasting time. There is no mercy for those who have sinned as I have."

"There is mercy for all. Heaven's forgiveness cannot be measured except by our needs," was the softly-spoken answer.



"THEN," SAID CLARICE IN A LOW VOICE, "YOU ARE MY HUSBAND'S MOTHER."

Sybil was silent for a few minutes, then she opened her eyes.

"But do you know that I am guilty of what they accuse me of—that I really killed Sir Alvick?" she asked, painfully.

Clarice bowed her head.

"And knowing that, you still pray for me?"

"And knowing that, I still pray for you, and implore you to repent," returned the young girl, earnestly.

Sybil did not speak again, though once it seemed as if her lips moved in an effort to follow the prayers her half-sister was still offering up on her behalf, and just at the last, her fingers closed over those of Clarice in a convulsive pressure, while her wide-open eyes asked a dumb question, which Clarice interpreted and answered.

"I will not leave you, Sybil. I will stay with you till the end."

And she kept her word.

And so, though there was no trial, the mystery of the Chandos murder was solved, in so far as the culprit had herself confessed her guilt.

Concerning the reasons that prompted her crime Sybil was silent, but the probabilities are she went to the Tower with the intention of forcing her father to acknowledge her as his daughter, and finding him obdurate in his refusal, her quick Italian blood got the better of her, and seizing the pair of compasses which were lying on the table, she stabbed him before she quite realised what she was doing. This, at least, was Clarice's explanation of the matter, for she would not admit that the crime could have been premeditated. Then afterwards, urged by her love for Colin Middlemore, who could only afford to marry an heiress, Sybil had plotted against her half-sister's life, after assuring herself that Clarice's estates would, in the absence of a will, descend to her.

She had laid her plans well, but she had forgotten one thing—the all-seeing Providence that no human effort can deceive—the Eternal Justice that must in the end be triumphant.

And so, once more, Clarice took up her abode at Hurst Royal, waiting with what patience she might for the news of her husband which seemed so long in coming. She was in terrible uncertainty as to his fate. For months he had not been heard of, and the second expedition despatched in search of him had failed to come across any traces of his whereabouts.

As to his mother, she had disappeared directly after the death of Sybil, without a word as to her destination. Clarice supposed that her old nomadic habits had proved too strong for her, and she had set forth to join the gipsy tribe to which her mother's family had belonged.

Thus the summer passed away. The anniversary of Clarice's wedding-day came and went, and the weeks went by, until it was just twelve months since that memorable evening when Lennox, in the quixotic desire to shield his mother from the consequences of her supposed crime, had bidden his wife a last adieu.

Clarice sat in the waning light of the autumn evening, going over the scene once more, her heart sadder than ever with its eternal ache. Suddenly she stretched out her arms with a sharp cry of despairing love.

"Oh Lennox, Lennox, if I could only see you once more to ask forgiveness for my harsh judgment of you—if I could only tell you how my soul is sick for the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand."

She broke off abruptly. A shadow had fallen between her and the sunset sky, and the French window was thrown wide open. In the aperture stood the tall figure of El Yaldour.

"Clarice, I have brought your husband back to you. Let this be my atonement." She stood on one side, and a minute later Clarice was clasped in the arms of Lennox—Lennox, thin, and bronzed, and aged, but still her own true love. And in the sweetness of that caress, as lip touched lip, and heart spoke to heart, the misery of the past was for ever wiped out!

When they looked up, El Yaldour had disappeared. She had achieved the task she had set

herself, and it was likely enough, had gone back to the open-air life that she loved too dearly ever entirely to give up. True child of the desert as she was, she had chosen her name well—El Yaldour the wanderer.

Lennox had much to tell of his adventures, the dangers he had passed through, the perils he had survived, but the only one of these he cared to dwell on was that of a certain day when, deserted by his followers, sick in mind and body, he had lain down under a tree in a tropical forest, asking himself of what good life was to him, and whether it would not be better to lie there and die, since Love and Hope were alike dented him. Then, across the torpid silence of the forest, he had heard his own name spoken by his wife's voice, and the feeling that she was near him was so strong that he looked up in the full expectation of seeing her. Instead of Clarice, his gaze had fallen on the venomous snake coiled round the branch of the tree above him, just ready to spring. After that he could not divest himself of the feeling that Love could indeed annihilate Distance, and the desire to go back, and look once more on Clarice's face, carried everything before it. He retraced his footsteps, but as he neared the coast, he was waylaid by natives stripped of everything he possessed, and left for dead. That he survived was a mystery, and an equal mystery was the fact that his mother traced and found him. She had set out for Africa without saying a word as to her destination, neither would she let Lennox write to apprise his wife of his arrival.

"I will take you to her myself," she said. "It was I who parted you, and I will bring you together again."

And thus we leave them, happy in the sunshine of their wedded love, with the music of children's voices, and the patter of children's footsteps making glad their home, and the Past softened into a memory of sorrows overcome for "Love's sweet sake."

[THE END.]



"SAY YOU WILL TRUST ME NOW AND ALWAYS: GIVE ME YOUR HAND UPON IT!" SAID ALVERLEY, SOFTLY.

THE LOST STAR.

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CHAPTER XV.

RUBY ST. HELLERS returned to Chester Chase without misadventure, in spite of the Countess's gloomy prognostications as to the danger of travelling on Boxing-day.

Lord Alverley was still confined to his bed; and his arm was so painful that he had made up his mind to go to town as soon as he could move, for further advice. Lady Chester was anxious to send for Dr. Morton, who always attended him in London, but he said that Phillips knew enough about surgery to patch him up for the present, so that he could very well wait till he was stronger, and meanwhile he did not care to be probed and poulticed by that "little fool Morton."

The rest of the party were skating on the lake, in the full enjoyment of the exhilarating weather; and Alverley, the spoilt child of fortune, who had rarely known what it was to be thwarted, chafed impatiently at his enforced imprisonment.

The Countess came and purred over him like a sleek domestic cat over its sick kitten, and answered all his questions with amiable consideration.

He never mentioned Ruby's name to his mother, for he was naturally anxious for her sake more than for his own that no one should suspect the interest he felt in her; but by adroit inquiries he elicited the information that she had returned to the Chase at the time appointed; that she had begged to be excused from coming down to the drawing-room in the evening on account of her injured arm, and that she had taken no part in the skating.

He felt that he could lie there more tranquilly, knowing that neither Harold nor Marston would have a chance of looking upon the pretty face which was gradually filling his thoughts by day and night.

As to the future, his intentions were perfectly

vague. He had flirted during the last season with an heiress named Imogen Deyncourt, who made no secret of her attachment to the young Vicount; and sometimes when worried by the remembrance of several pressing duns, he had comforted himself with the thought that her fortune would very conveniently pay some of his heavy bills. But ever since his first unconventional meeting with Ruby St. Hellers, the thought of Miss Deyncourt's money-bags had grown less and less tempting, and the heiress seemed to lose all personal attraction when compared with his sister's governess.

In spite of the cankering influence of the world, there was a small vein of chivalry still left in Lord Alverley's composition, and his heart was touched as much by Ruby's forlorn position as by her bewildering beauty.

It seemed such a barbarous whim of fate, to condemn a young girl of her antecedents—the daughter of one of the proudest houses in Devonshire—to go out alone in her innocent loveliness, to do battle with the scorn and prejudice of the most hard-judging society in the universe, with no arms but her own courage and self-respect to protect her from the snares which were always ready for the shoeless feet of the poor and defenceless.

As to whether he himself were laying a snare for her he never acknowledged even to his own inner consciousness; he only knew that she could make his heart beat faster than it had ever throbbed for any other woman on earth, and that the sound of her voice was sweeter music to his ears than the first mellow notes of the hounds when the fox broke from its cover on Bisgden Gorse.

Knowing this, he was prepared to pursue his little game of covert attentions and flirtations "under the rose," never doubting his own powers of fascination, and yet, with the selfishness peculiar to men of his stamp, never thinking of the sorrow which a passion for himself would bring on the girl he meant to play with.

Three days passed, and Saturday came, with

no change in the weather. The frost still continued, and the ice on the lake was as firm as a rock.

Hunters were eating their heads off in the stables, and foxes stole out of their holes in open day with no fear of being hurried to death by their enemies—the hounds—whilst providing themselves and their families with food for the morrow.

"Where's everybody?" inquired Lord Alverley of his man, as he looked dreamily out of the window across the frost-bound park.

"Her ladyship has gone out for a drive towards Cowley, I believe; and three of the ladies have gone with her. His lordship, the Earl, went up to town early this morning, and does not return till Monday."

"Yes—yes!" impatiently; "and the others?"

"The rest, my lord, are all on the lake, except Miss St. Hellers, who is taking a breath of air in the shrubbery," and Phillips folded up a pair of trousers with a covert smile.

"Humph! Then if I take a turn in the garden there will be no one to disturb me."

"Not anyone, I should say. Shall you be able to do without my arm?"

"Quite. I feel as if the air would give me strength. You had better come down with me and help me on with my coat."

Phillips obeyed, and when the old-fashioned Inverness—the only outer garment which Alverley could wear—was properly adjusted over the bandaged arm, he was not in the least surprised to see that his master's footsteps turned towards the breakfast-room, the window of which was the nearest point of egress to the shrubbery.

Ruby, perfectly unconscious of the interruption which was slowly coming towards her, walked briskly to the end of the shrubbery, and leant over the gate which led into the park. A cold east wind was blowing the frosty particles from the blades of grass and bringing to her ears the shouts of laughter and cries of excitement which proceeded from the skaters on the lake.

With a little sigh she turned away, hoping that Lady Clementina, who had offered to take charge of the children, would look after them properly; and thinking rather sadly of the brighter days in Devonshire, when she had flown like a bird over the shimmering sea, with a heart as light as her feet. She scolded herself for useless repining; but it did seem hard to be walking there alone under the shadowy trees, because no one had cared to ask her to join the party on the lake—no one, that is to say, but little May and Beatrice, who had entreated her to come with all the childish eloquence they could muster.

A turn in the path, and to her immense surprise she came face to face with the invalid, whom she imagined to be safely shut up in his bedroom.

He took off his hat with a sweeping bow, then held out his hand.

"You look as if you thought I were a ghost," he said, with a smile. "Did you not know that if you were in the shrubbery I could not be far off?"

"No, or I should not be here."

"More frank than encouraging. Are you not glad to see me up and about after all I have gone through?"

"I should be glad to know you were well enough to get out; and I could be quite content with that," she said, demurely, with her eyes fixed on a lichen-covered stump.

"And I could be content with nothing short of sight; so directly I heard where you were I hurried out as fast as I could get here. I have been in a fever to know how you were!"

"I knew you had a feverish attack, but I thought it came from something more serious—that would scarcely have kept you in bed."

"No; but it made me get out of it. You were hurt I know, but your face"—examining it critically—"has not suffered."

She drew back with a blush. "No, it was saved by your scarf."

"And you have never so much as thanked me. I thought a woman's outward charms were dearer to her than her life."

"That might not be saying much," she said, softly, as if to herself.

"Not much!" he repeated slowly; "why surely it is worth all the world to that twin sister for whom you deserted us all on Christmas Day!"

She shook her head sadly.

"Not now. My aunt will soon arrive from India, and she has asked one of us to come to her. Of course Violet will go."

"And you?" he asked, eagerly. "What will become of you?"

"I shall go on just the same as before."

"Telling and slaving till the last!" he murmured, compassionately.

She drew up her head proudly as if to disclaim his compassion.

"No one is to be pitted who has good health, average abilities, and a clear conscience."

"I don't know that," his half-closed eyes resting on her with unconcealed admiration.

"You might be sitting alone on a moor, perfectly well, perfectly innocent, and perfectly able to talk—if there were anyone to talk to—in every modern language; but without a roof to your head, or a crust to eat, I should think you very much to be pitied!"

"But if I had any common-sense, I should take care not to get myself into such a position."

"You might intend to take care, but with the greatest care in the world people like yourself are sure to get into holes."

"Why?" And for the first time she raised her eyes to his face, and saw how haggard it looked in the dusky light.

"I cannot stand," he said, wearily; "there is a summer-house close by; come into that, and I will tell you."

She shook her head. "No, it is too late, and I am going in."

"You could not be so unkind! I came out here on purpose to say good-bye to you; and, upon my honour, I don't feel as if I could get back without a rest first."

"Then I will leave you to rest whilst I go

up to the house and send your servant to fetch you."

"Thank you, but I don't wish to be fetched like a parcel; and, besides, if you gave the order," with a slight smile, "Phillips would never forget it. I only ask you to stay five minutes, and then I shall be able to walk back to the house with you. Come, you cannot surely be so absurdly prudish as to refuse!"

Very unwillingly she turned down a path which led to the summer-house. In summer-time it was completely screened from view by the trees, but now it could be plainly seen from the path they had just quitted if curious eyes glanced in its direction.

Lord Alverley sank down on the seat with a sigh of fatigue, and motioned to her to take her place beside him, with an apology for not having waited; but Ruby remained standing.

"Why am I likely to get into a hole, Lord Alverley?" she asked, gravely.

"Because you would always be ready to sacrifice yourself recklessly for—perhaps—an unworthy object."

"Do you mean my sister?" In indignant surprise.

"Remember, I have never seen her, but I am prejudiced against her because she lets you work for her, whilst she, I presume, does nothing; and she takes advantage of the offer of this comfortable home with your aunt, which seems yours by right as much as hers."

"And why does she do all this?" and Ruby drew a deep breath as if anxious to relieve her outraged feelings. "Why? Simply because she loves me, and would do always, and under all circumstances, what I wish. She knows that it is the only pleasure left me in life to work for her, and she knows that I would rather die than go into a luxurious home and leave her to be buffeted about in the cold outside."

"Just as I thought!" he said, quietly. "I knew she must be selfish."

"Those very words show how little you know," with the indulgent smile proper to superior information. "She said it would break her heart to live in comfort with my aunt whilst I was what I am."

"And yet by your own confession, she is going to do it."

"Of course she is; but simply because I made her."

"Then it is your accepted *role* in life to give up your own will, your own wishes, and your own chances of happiness for the sake of this most unselfish of sisters!"

"By no means! I told you that all this was done by my express wish; and I know best in what my chance of happiness lies."

"Yes; like the nuns of old, you will give up everything for a dream. Ruby!" he said, impulsively, moved beyond restraint by genuine admiration of her utter unselfishness, "is there no one but me in the whole wide world to have a thought or care for yourself?"

She turned her face to the setting sun, with wistful eyes fixed on the glory in the west.

"Yes," she said, softly; "I trust myself to Providence, and I feel that I shall never come to grief."

"You are not like the old bishop in a storm then, who, when told by the captain of the steamer, 'we must trust to Providence, for nothing else can save us!' exclaimed in a horrible fright: 'Good Heavens! has it come to that!'"

"No, I am not. If I had not that hope to rest on I should feel I must give up at once."

"Even with me as your friend and supporter in the background?"

"Even with that!"

"Our bond of friendship is never to be broken, remember that! I go away on Monday on account of this bothering arm; but I shall depend on your promise; and if you send for me you may stake your existence that I shall never fail you. Don't you trust me!"

"I think you will keep your word!" she said, eagerly.

He got up with a sigh, as if very tired, and, looking down into her face, said, in his softest of tones, "Won't you trust me, Ruby?"

She raised her eyes to his with a shy and fleeting glance—"I don't know."

He bent lower, his eyes still fixed upon her drooping lashes. "I think you might. Say you will trust me now and always. Give me your hand upon it!"

Overcome by the subtle charm in his voice and manner, she let her hand rest in his for a minute; but when he stooped and pressed it to his lips, she caught it away as if she had been stung. Why was it so difficult to resist him, when instinct told her that she must be on her guard?

With cheeks like the setting sun, she turned resolutely away, but he hurried after her, and walked up the path by her side. He went on talking in his slow, musical tones, but she scarcely answered him. Her thoughts were bewildered, and her heart beating fast.

As they emerged on to the lawn they heard the voices of the skaters close behind them.

"Will you go into the house and leave me to meet them alone?"

"No," she said, firmly, determined that there should be nothing clandestine in her conduct—at least when she could help it. "I will wait here for the children."

He smiled.

"You have the courage of a fly. You would always rather go on, even to destruction, than turn back."

"But I have not reached destruction yet."

"No, these are the days of miracles, when the 'pine-tree' can only flourish by the side of the 'palm.'"

"But the poor little palm would wither in the cold."

"Not if the pine-tree came down into the sunshine."

"But Helms says that that can never be."

"Helms talks romantic bosh. He never dreams of a frank friendship such as ours."

"Alverley, is it possible?" exclaimed Lady Clementina, as, wrapped in furs from head to foot, she came from under the shadow of the trees, and caught sight of her brother lounging against the balustrade of the iron staircase by the side of a slight figure, which she recognised with a frown.

"Yes. Is there anything supernatural in my appearance?" he said, quietly. "Miss S. Helms looked as shocked when she caught sight of me as if she had seen a ghost!"

"And no wonder. Don't you know that when the sun sets there is a peculiarly dangerous chill?"

"I feel the chill," he replied, with a shiver, "but I don't know about the danger. It isn't pleasant, so there can be no fear."

"I was thinking," said Captain Marston, who had appeared with the rest of the party by this time, holding Lady Clementina's skates in his hand, as well as his own, "that perhaps the danger was over as well as the pleasure!"

The words were spoken in an aside to Ruby, but Harold overheard them.

"I don't understand," she said, coldly. "I find neither danger nor pleasure in loitering about a damp garden on a winter's afternoon."

"And yet you loitered!" looking curiously into her serious face.

"I do many things now which are the reverse of pleasant, as perhaps even you may understand."

Then she turned away, and, calling the children to follow her, disappeared into the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN Ruby went up to her room that evening she found a handsome dress of Spanish lace and black satin laid upon her bed. A piece of paper was pinned to it, with some writing upon it. Taking it to the light she read, "With May's love. A small amends for the disaster of Christmas Eve."

A flush of pain and pleasure rose to her cheeks. It was rather bitter to change from the giver into the receiver of homely additions to the toilette, but at the same time it saved her from the mortification of having to appear

amongst the well-dressed throng downstairs in her ample gown; and she thoroughly appreciated the delicacy of feeling which caused the gift to come from a child, when it had, no doubt been paid for by her mother.

As she dressed herself in it for the evening she looked at her own reflection with pardonable pride. In fancy she went back to her own home, and felt her dear mother's fond eyes resting upon her once more, whilst her father, after examining her critically through his double eye-glasses, murmured, "Pon my word, the dead image of her mother!" which was the highest praise he could accord to any woman.

As Ruby entered the drawing-room, she noticed a striking-looking stranger amongst the group of ladies round the fireplace. It was Miss Deyncourt, who had arrived just before dinner, with the intention of spending a week at the Chase; but on hearing that Lord Alverley intended to leave on the Monday, she suddenly recollected an engagement which forced her to be in town on the same day. She had dark hair, arranged in a fashion of her own at the top of her head. Her eyes were large, but expressionless; her nose a trifle too long for perfect symmetry; her mouth broad, but well-shaped, and when her full lips parted, they disclosed a row of white and even teeth. She was tall, with a long neck, broad shoulders, and magnificent bust, and her figure was shown off to full advantage by a black velvet, which clung round her limbs like a shroud. There were no excrescences of lace to take off the severity of this garment, which was confined round the waist by a gold band with a diamond clasp, matching the coronet in her hair, and the dazzling necklace round her throat.

Lord Alverley was lying on the sofa looking more dead than alive, but the ends of his moustaches quivered with a smile as Ruby came into the room. Presently Miss Deyncourt, after a cool stare at her, detached herself from the other ladies, and sat down on a low chair by the Viscount's side.

The rest of the gentlemen sauntered in as Ruby, with a slight blush, had just finished her speech of thanks to the Countess, who smiled on her graciously, and said she was glad to see the dress was so becoming.

There was a pause in the buzz of conversation, such as often occurs in a crowded room, and Miss Deyncourt's harsh voice broke the silence.

"Is that faded-looking girl who is so ridiculously overdressed your sister's governess?"

"No!" said Alverley, promptly. "Miss St. Hellers is standing by my mother, and is looking even better than usual to-night."

"That's the very girl I mean; and I say that it is absurd for her to dress like that at a nursery-governess. Stiff and nonsense! In these levelling days I delight in doing my best to keep such people in their proper place."

"A laudable undertaking," he said, slowly; "but it would be awkward, after all, to make a mistake as to the proper place. Did you ever happen to come across Sir Robert St. Hellers?"

"Certainly I did. He was very good to my father at the time of the elections, and I remember staying at the Mount—a perfect paradise—when I was about the height of your walking-stick."

"This is his daughter. So you see what a mistake you might have made," and he smiled at the change in her face, "as you would never have guessed that her proper place was Paradise."

"The daughter of Sir Robert Hellers—the proudest man in the county!" she exclaimed, with something like a gasp. "Good Heavens, how the mighty are fallen!"

"Yes, it is shamefully hard for her, but uncommonly fortunate for my sisters. I only wish I were a little girl in pinafores."

"When you are I will come and teach you myself," with a kind nod.

"Thanks; but you would make me nervous. I couldn't say dialogue to an individual in serge or brown holland, and of course you would dress down to the position."

"Perhaps not. I might follow the example set by Miss St. Hellers."

"You might do worse. She knows how to efface herself with dignity, and appear without embarrassment just when she is wanted. A capital virtue in a woman."

"Have you lost your heart?" with a swift glance into his eyes.

"You know I had none to lose. My mother thinks very highly of her, and, of course, I am entirely guided by her opinion. How am I to form one of my own, when we are separated as the two poles?"

"True. I don't suppose you ever meet except in the evening, like this?"

"How should we! She is always with her pupils, and I have been a prisoner in my own bedroom. Ah! why did you not come before to nurse me?"

She looked down on him with a gratified smile.

"Ah! why, indeed? You ought to have sent for me."

"If I had thought you would come!" with a look over his shoulder to see if no one was disposed to come and save him from a laborious flirtation.

Ruby, looking unusually white and nervous, had just taken her place on the music-stool, where she was slowly drawing off her gloves. There was no one by her to turn over her leaves or support her in any way in that room full of strangers; and cruelly wounded by the remarks she had overheard, it was evident to any one who took the trouble to look into her face that it was with difficulty that she could maintain her composure.

"What a shame!" muttered Alverley, as he listened with some anxiety for the first notes.

They were not as clear as usual, and there was a slight hesitation when the bottom of the page was reached and it had to be turned over.

She had accomplished it when she heard a slight commotion; a chair was pushed back hurriedly, a sofa creaked, and presently a countess was stretched out to perform that office for her.

Without looking up she recognised the hand whitened by illness, and overwhelmed by the thought of the invalid exerting himself so far on her behalf, she nearly lost her place.

"Sing your best," he whispered, "it may be long before I hear you again."

Encouraged by his sympathy and interest her voice recovered its purity, and ringing out in full sweetness through the room enforced silence on the most talkative among the crowd. Her heart swelled with triumph, as she compelled the sneer to vanish from Miss Deyncourt's lips, and a murmur of applause rose on every side.

"Thank you," she said, simply, to Lord Alverley; but for a moment their eyes met, and seemed to tell so much, that here at least sank hurriedly on to the keys, whilst he went back to his sofa, wondering if there were anything in life so sweet as this friendship "under the rose."

"Harold, how could you let your brother disturb himself, when he looks as if it were almost too much exertion to open his lips!"

"My dear mother!" and he shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference. "You ought to know by this time, that Alverley is always strong enough to do what he wishes, and weak enough to be able to avoid what he doesn't like."

"That has nothing to do with the present case. When poor Miss St. Hellers was left to turn over her own leaves, and common charity compelled him to do it, as you would not stir."

Then the Countess turned away with an expression of severity on her usually placid countenance, and Harold smiled to think how blind she was!

Miss Deyncourt's eyes, on the contrary, were wide open, and with a scornful glance at Ruby, who was standing at a little distance talking to an old lady, she remarked in a loud whisper—

"I really think that if I practised every day as I suppose she is obliged to do to keep up her music, I should be thoroughly accustomed by this time to turning over my own pages."

A look flashed from Alverley's eyes that might have warned her not to go too far; but he only remarked in his sleepiest manner,—

"How fortunate it is for us all that all women are not so independent as Miss Deyncourt."

"For my own part I detest affectation," she said, with heightened colour.

"Do you? It rather amuses me whenever I come across it, which is not very often in these days. It strikes me as so very kind in a woman to take so much trouble to please me."

"Oh! very kind, when they do it for their own sakes instead of yours; but I know you only say it to disagree with me."

"What can be further from my thoughts or wishes?"

"Anything. Is Captain Marston going to marry your sister?"

"If he consults me I shall say 'don't,'"

"But is he thinking of it?"

"He's not quite a fool, and he knows that Clem has a temper of her own."

"Most women have."

"Possibly; but it's not my experience of them. Won't you sing us a song?"

"No, for I don't want you to disturb yourself again."

"Oh! Harold is close by, and will be delighted."

"Thank you. You could do it for Miss St. Hellers, but not for me," and with her head held high in the air she walked away.

Ruby meanwhile, with every pulse in her body quivering with indignation, had hidden herself in the conservatory. She had never met with such rudeness before, and the humiliation was much more than she could bear. She had schooled herself to meet the unpleasantness of her present position with calm resignation, but she could not submit with patience to being insulted by an adversary who took care to give her no chance of reply!

As she paced up and down amongst the gorgeous flowers she felt so utterly miserable that it was with difficulty that she could keep the tears from running down her cheeks.

Alone in that great house with no one to take her part (for she had not heard Lord Alverley's answer), a wild longing came over her for the sound of Violet's voice, the loving touch of her arms. She would have given anything to be able to throw herself upon her neck, and be kissed and petted into recovered self-respect; but there was not a soul to whom she could turn in this semi-palace of a cage; for the women were all against her (she forgot the Countess) and the men were out of the question. Even Harold Jerningham, who was so kind to her on the journey down that she was deluded into the belief that he would be her staunch friend through good report and ill, had grown so cold and stern in his manner that she ceased to look to him for counsel or support; and Captain Marston had changed his tactics so completely, that instead of forcing his distasteful friendship upon her, he had not taken the slightest notice of her during the course of the evening.

To be taken up one day and forgotten the next is a disagreeable experience through which "the needy gentlewoman" has too often to pass, and it requires an immense amount of philosophy to enable the sufferer to bear it with any patience. Ruby was new to the experience, and therefore suffered acutely.

Bending over the fragrant blossom of a Cape jessamine, she came to the conclusion that it would be better—far better—to confine herself exclusively to the children's society in the school-room, than to expose herself to fresh humiliation from any chance guest who had neither the good breeding nor good feeling to treat her with proper respect. The old life had gone for ever; she no longer belonged to the world of fashion and pleasure, and it was little joy to look on at it as a spectator, and be forgotten in a crowd. She was so engrossed in her bitter reflections that she failed to hear the steps which were coming nearer and nearer.

Harold stopped to admire the pose of the graceful figure before he spoke. The dejection, so plainly written on the downcast face, moved his kindly heart with true compassion.

"We were beginning to be afraid that you had retired to bed with a headache till I caught a glimpse of your dream amongst the flowers."

At the sound of his voice she looked up like a startled bird.

"My head is all right, thank you."

"Then you will come and sing us another song!"

She shook her head and bent it again, as if in anxious examination of a particular blossom.

"We have just been suffering tortures from a duet performed by the two Misses Simpson, and my father said, 'Bah! it was worse than a dose of medicine. For Heaven's sake, ask Miss St. Helliers to come and take the taste out of our mouths!'"

Ruby did not laugh, as he had meant her to; and there was a silence, during which she picked a green leaf and twisted it in her fingers.

Determined to win her back to her usual runniness, he placed himself in front of her, and looked down into her face with his pleasant smile.

"You will not be so unkind as to refuse!"

"I cannot sing to-night, believe me, Mr. Jerningham. If I tried I should break down."

The soft eyes were raised to his for a moment, and he saw that they were full of tears.

In an instant the barrier of reserve that jealous suspicion and hurt feelings had raised between them nearly gave way, but he recollected that his brother was her chosen champion, and his own services were *de trop*, so only answered gravely,—

"I have to apologise, I know, for the rudeness of one of our guests; but as she was promptly answered and set down, I don't see why you should take it to heart."

"I did not hear the answer; I thought no one took my part."

"When Alverley was in the room—was it likely?"

"You were silent," she said, with burning cheeks.

"Yes. There was no occasion for me to speak when my brother made your cause his own," with a significant glance.

"Lord Alverley, like a true gentleman, objects to seeing a woman trampled on. He was kind to me, and I am very grateful!" and she raised her eyes fearlessly.

"Women are always fond of him," he said, with a scornful smile; "but he is apt to get into disgrace with husbands, brothers, and friends."

"As I have no husband, no brother, and no friend, he can take such few opportunities as he in his way of doing a kindness to me without fear. There is no one to object to his interference."

"Is it not rather rash to talk like that?"

"Rash! I don't know. Perhaps if Miss Deyncourt stays here much longer I may grow rasher still!" Her face was white, her lips quivered; but, in spite of her wild words, she still looked so gentle and refined that his heart bled for her.

"I would not let a heartless woman like Miss Deyncourt have such an influence over me! I would not give her the triumph of seeing she could upset me by a word."

"It is very well for you who speak from the vantage ground of a good position," she exclaimed, her heart swelling with bitterness; "but for me—utterly defenceless—and thrust down in the dust, every hit tells."

"Do you think I don't feel it!" in a voice hoarse with suppressed feeling.

"I thought you did once, but not now;" and her head drooped sadly.

"Why not now?" unreasonably angered at the consequences of his own conduct.

"You have been angry with me for some reason or other—I have often wondered why?"

"Angry with you! Oh! dear, no! Of course, you had a right to choose your own friends, and if you think Marston and Alverley more to be depended on than myself," with a shrug of his shoulders, "why, I can't help it, though I think you most unwise!"

"Captain Marston is no friend of mine, although, as we walked home together from the decorations, he begged for peace instead of war, and I could not refuse it with the words of the

Christmas-hymn ringing in my ears. But had you not better go back to your guests!"

"Will you say the same of Alverley?" he said, eagerly ignoring the last suggestion, and fixing his eyes upon her face as if he would force the truth from her expression, if not from her words.

And as he looked a wave of crimson, which she would have given anything on earth to suppress, mounted slowly over the softness of her cheeks to the low, broad brow.

He bit his lip and turned on his heel.

"Stay!" she cried; "you have not waited for an answer!"

He looked back over his shoulder, his handsome face stern and set.

"Your cheeks have answered for you!"

Then he walked away between the rows of tall camellias and left her looking after him, with an expression of pain and infinite longing on her lovely features—pain that no doctor's hand could ever cure—and longing, such as grows like the thirst of the desert in the soul of the disappointed, when the prize that was wished for vanishes for ever out of sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON Sunday afternoon the frost broke up, and the heavy clouds which had hung over the hills through the morning, and seemed to be charged with abundance of snow, discharged themselves, on the contrary, in a storm of rain. The men of the party, with the exception of Lord Alverley and one or two others who stayed to keep him company, dawdled about the stables, trying to kill time as best they could with discussions over the rival merits of the horses, or the judiciousness of the various entries in their betting-books; whilst the ladies yawned over the fire in the drawing-room, longing for the advent of a visitor, or anything else, that could break the deadly monotony of the slowly passing hours.

Even Ruby St. Helliers decided it was impossible to go to church; so after reading the service with the children, she sat down at the piano, and in the glorious music of Mozart found a panacea for the troubles and tangles of life. Soothed as if by a voice from an angel's mouth, she regained her wonted cheerful spirit.

The children sat in the firelight on the hearth-rug playing with some elaborate puzzle supposed to represent the intricacies of the Garden of Eden; but they stopped every now and then to listen to the music, with a look of awe on their pretty faces.

"Come, and let us sing a carol together," said Ruby, cheerfully; and turning round to the piano she played the first notes of one they all knew. "Earthly friends may fail and falter."

The children had sweet voices, and a very good idea of time, so that their childish trebles blended very well with Ruby's richer notes.

There was a group of people muffled in ulsters gathered under the window unknown to those inside, and gradually those who knew the words joined in the carol till there was quite a chorus of voices outside in the rain.

The children were delighted, and insisted upon having another. They grew so excited at the refrain from down below that it was only Ruby's calm gravity which kept them at all to the time; and when it was finished, she closed the piano decidedly, and refused to play any more.

Then there was a sound of footsteps on the soaking gravel, followed by a silence; and Ruby, with a sigh of relief, sat down on the hearth-rug, with a child on either side of her, and began the story of an Eastern king, which whiled away the time so nicely that tea came a great deal too soon.

Anna, the schoolroom maid—a good-looking girl with rather a Jewish cast of countenance—drew the curtains, lighted the lamp, and laid the cloth, all with a sullen air of gloom as if she were doing it under protest. Ruby rarely spoke to her, for she generally contrived to make her short answers as uncivil as she could, without being exactly insulting; and to quarrel with a servant was obnoxious to her disposition.

As she sat down at the head of the table she

was annoyed to perceive a small note, the corner of which protruded from under her plate. It must have been put there by Anna, and instinct told her at once that it could come from nobody but Lord Alverley.

Indignant at the idea that he should dare to write to her, and send the note by the hand of a servant in this surreptitious manner, she crushed her plate down upon it as if it had been some disgusting insect, and burning with anger, took up the teapot with shaky fingers.

Her cheeks were crimson, her eyes flashed fire; and May, who happened to look up at her as she was helping herself to a piece of cake, dropped the knife with a loud clatter, thinking that she was going to be scolded; but tea was over, and the scolding never came, so she ran away, followed by Beatrice, to be made tidy for the drawing room.

When she was alone Ruby opened the letter, still with the same expression of disgust and anger on her face. It ran thus,—

"If the children had not stuck to you like a pair of leeches I should have asked for an interview this afternoon. By this time to-morrow I shall be gone, but let the serpent-ring remind you that you have a friend in London, who will be by your side in a moment, directly he is sent for—St. James's-street, will always find me. Never think yourself forgotten or slighted, even when odious creatures insult you, and I am constrained to stay only a thousandth part of what I mean. Don't forget me, Ruby.—Yours most devotedly and respectfully, "ALVERLEY."

She tore it into a hundred shreds and threw them into the fire. Then she rang the bell. The only word for which she was grateful in the short effusion was the "respectfully" at the end, but even that roused her scorn.

"Much respect he has shown me," she murmured, with flashing eyes. "Compromising me in the eyes of a girl like that. Never trouble yourself to set the part of postman again," she said, slowly and distinctly, as the schoolroom maid appeared in answer to her summons, and began to clear away the tea. "Letters that cannot come by the usual way through the post-bag are wrongly addressed to me, and will only be thrown into the fire."

"I did as I was told," and her sullen face looked more clouded than ever. "You can throw it away afterwards, if you don't want to keep it."

"Of course I can throw them away, but I don't choose to have them brought to me at all. See that it never occurs again," and with her head thrown back proudly, she walked out of the room.

The girl looked after her with an evil light in her eyes. "Your airs and graces won't go down with me. Them as takes walks in the garden when all the others are out of the way—them as talks for hours in a parlour a-firting and a-going on shamefully, don't want letters. Oh, no! not at all. It's well to throw them into the fire, one burnt ashes tell no tales, and they haven't been read first—no, of course they haven't! And he so ill too, with his poor knees knocking together, looking like a white 'ol'lock with the stalk split in half. If he had but a-written one line to me, I'd have stuck it in my Prayer-book, and kept it for ever and a day. But since this pasty-faced governess has been in the house, he takes no more notice of me than if I were the mat under his feet." With a prodigious sigh she whisked the white tablecloth off the table, folded it up neatly in spite of her agitation, and, taking up the tray, departed.

"So Miss St. Helliers does not give us the benefit of her society on Sunday evenings," said Imogen Deyncourt, as she lounged at her ease in a large arm-chair, with her well-shaped feet, in elaborately embroidered high-heeled shoes, stretched out on a stool, and exhibited to the public for nothing.

"She does generally, but she evidently thinks that there is some unhallowed element amongst us to-day, for she has not allowed us a glimpse of her face, except in the pew in church."

"What do you mean by that, Captain Mars-

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ton! Am I the element in question?" looking full in his face, with her large eyes.

"I never said so! Two suns you know can never reign in the same sphere."

"I certainly don't want to be in the same as Miss St. Hellera."

"Perhaps you would like to be a comet—dash into her when least expected, and produce spontaneous combustion."

"If she got in my way—otherwise I would rather leave her alone."

"How magnanimous!" murmured Lord Alverley. "There is nothing so generous as a woman."

"By-the-bye, what was that noise that I heard in the garden this afternoon, just as I was coming downstairs for five o'clock tea?"

"Noise!" echoed Harold, in pretended indignation. "That is how she describes a concert worthy of the Albert Hall at least!"

"So you were there too?" looking at him with some curiosity. "And what was it all about? I thought Moody and Sankey were in possession, or that the Salvation Army was loose in the park!"

"I wonder you didn't come out to see!"

"On the contrary, I felt inclined to hide myself in the cellar."

"My dear Miss Deyncourt, please explain to what you are alluding," exclaimed the Countess, in great perplexity; "I am quite in the dark."

"And so am I. Captain Marston could tell us, but he won't."

Thus appealed to he leant forward, with a malicious gleam in his eyes, conscious that Alverley was on the alert, and dying to know what had really happened, though he preserved an appearance of sleepy indifference.

"As we were coming through the garden, on our way from the stables, we heard what sounded like a choir of angels just above our heads, and naturally stopped still to listen."

"I shouldn't have thought that was in your line," said Miss Deyncourt, contemptuously.

"See how you misjudged me! It was so much in my line that I could not restrain myself from joining in it, however unmusically, and all the others followed my example."

"And when it was over you were rewarded by a sight of beauty at the window!" with a decided sneer.

"Nothing of the kind. We looked up with longing eyes—and saw the wet window-panes—that was all."

"And quite as much as you deserved," said Alverley, quickly. "Who asked you to come and how!"

"Miss St. Hellera must have been extremely flattered." And the heiress looked rather cross.

"Do you think so?" said Harold, gravely. "I was afraid that we had annoyed her, because she shut up so quickly."

"As if a girl like that were ever annoyed at attention from the other sex!"

"If you were a man, Miss St. Hellera would have made you find it out by this time," said Captain Marston, with a mischievous smile.

"Why? Have you tried?"

"Often, and been most mercilessly rebuffed. Ask Alverley, ask Jerningham, they will all tell the same tale."

Miss Deyncourt, on the contrary, preferred to change the subject.

(To be continued.)

If a man loves the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him.

It is worth while to know that bits of nice toilet soap may be utilized in various ways, and be made to do good service. Take a teaspoonful of scraps of toilet soap, add water, and when soap is melted thicken with oatmeal and pour into cups or moulds to cool. This is an excellent soap for the hands and face or for the bath.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfuous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. Horn, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth

MR. WILL HAMMOND was apparently reading the morning paper. He was in reality thinking of pretty Rena Browning, and wondering if he would ever have the courage to tell her how passionately, how devotedly, he loved her, when his sister May, or more properly speaking, Mrs. Tom Stevens, came rushing into the library, with an open telegram in her hand.

"Will!" she cried, in a sharp voice.

And the dreaming reader sprang to his feet, and his face flushed guiltily; for Will Hammond was one of the most bashful men living, and to be detected in the act of even thinking of a beautiful woman was sufficient to bring blushes of confusion to his face.

"Well, May!" he managed at last to articulate.

"I've just got a telegram from Tom. Bernhardt plays Theodora to-night. It's her farewell performance, and he wants me to see her. I'm to take the ten-fifteen train, and meet him at the office. The railway communication is so wretchedly poor, that we'll have to remain in the city over night. The last train leaves for Glendale before the theatres close."

"Hope you'll enjoy yourself, May," ventured Will, with an ill-concealed yawn, for he had seen Bernhardt in all her rôles, and had none of his sister's enthusiasm over the matter.

"Oh, I shall be sure to!" she answered; and then continuing, said, with an air of timid hesitation, "I have a favour to ask of you, Will."

"Well?"

"It will be impossible to take Nellie, of course, and I want you to take charge of her until we return."

"Me take charge of that be—angel of goodness!" cried Will, aghast. "Why, May, I don't know anything more about children and their wants than the man in the moon does about the Fashoda Question!"

"High time you were learning!" retorted his sister. "You'll be having children of your own one of these days, and really Nellie is no bother at all. Nurse will give her her supper, and put her to bed. All you'll have to do will be to amuse her."

"Me amuse Nellie!" he cried, in a tone the irony of which was lost upon his sister.

"Yes. You'll find her easily entertained; and if the poor dear child cries for me, when she finds I am gone, you must soothe her. I hate to steal off from the angel in this way, but the carriage is at the door, and I'm all dressed. If she should beg me to remain, with tears in her eyes, it would ruin all my evening's pleasure. She is busy with her playthings now, the darling, and it may be an hour before she will require your attention. Now, be a good boy, and keep Nellie's thoughts diverted from me."

She waived a kiss to her brother on the tips of her pink fingers, and tripped away, not hearing, or, if hearing, not heeding the agonized groan which burst from his lips.

If there was one thing that exceeded Will's bashfulness in the presence of pretty Rena Browning, it was the numbing terror with which he regarded his niece Nellie, who was badly spoiled, and universally acknowledged to be an *enfant terrible*.

"Heavens!" he moaned, when the carriage containing his sister rolled away, and he actually wiped the perspiration of fear from his forehead. "Was ever a man so unfortunate? To be alone with that terrible child for twenty-four hours! It's enough to turn my hair white. I won't do it. I'll shut myself up in my room and plead a headache. The nurse can surely manage her better than I can. I don't know anything about children, and my sister's hopeful offspring is so—peculiar."

He picked up his paper, as though to leave the room, when the patter of childish footsteps was heard, and a little fairy in white, with long golden hair rippling over her shoulders, rushed into the room with her arms extended.

"Oh, Uncle Will!" she lisped, "nurse says

you and me is to keep house all by our two selves. Ain't it nice?"

"Very!" groaned Will.

"Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. Play horsey out on the lawn. You be horse—"

And before he could protest, she had mounted a chair, and was tying the ends of a worsted rope about his arms.

She had already captured his riding-whip, and although his soul rose up in rebellion, the impetuosity of Miss Nellie carried the day, and he trotted out on to the lawn, trying in his awkward way to imitate a prancing horse, all the time feeling very foolish and angry with himself and his juvenile tyrant.

She soon tired of this sport, however, and begged for a story.

He took her on his knee, and seated on one of the rustic benches on the lawn, told her all that he could remember.

He was fond of story-telling, and with her little golden head nestled down upon his shoulder, and her innocent blue eyes looking into his, he began to think that the task his sister had imposed upon him was not such a hard one after all.

"May's baby-talk has ruined the child," he thought. "If you treat children like grown persons, it's no trouble in the world to manage them."

He had just finished an exciting story about a fairy princess and a valiant prince, and Nellie's eyes were humid with the wondering thoughts which the story had conjured up.

"Uncle Will," she asked, suddenly, "do you love that pretty lady what come to see mamma yesterday?"

She referred to Rena Browning, and Will's face flushed scarlet.

"I—I— What put that idea into your head, Nellie?" he managed to say, finally.

"Because," she answered, gravely, "she told mamma about you just what I think."

"And what was that?" he asked, with quickened interest.

"That you was so amoooin'!"

At this Will burst into a sarcastic laugh.

"Do you tell her fairy stories?" persisted Nellie.

"Well—hardly!"

"Then I don't see how you amoose her. Now, we'll pretend that I'm her, and that you talk to me just like you do to her."

"As he had talked to her," he reflected. "How had he talked? How had he acted?"

He hardly knew himself, for the speeches that he had rehearsed until he knew them by heart he could never remember at the critical moment, and the story of his love had remained untold.

"Uncle Will," continued his inquisitor, breaking in on his thoughts, "was the story I heard you saying to yourself yesterday morning the one you tell her what's so amoooin'?"

"What story?" he cried, feeling very uncomfortable.

"This one," she said.

And, slipping from his arms, she fell upon one knee on the grass in front of him, and extended her dimpled hands, with an appealing, love-lorn expression on her baby-face, so close an imitation of his own position, gesture, and expression, that a savage light at being made fun of came to his eyes.

"Dear Miss Rena," she prattled, "I love you. I have loved you for months. Be my wife. I will devote my life to your happiness. Rena, darling, smile upon me, for I—"

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" cried Will, wrathfully.

And he caught her up with such force that she began to cry.

"There, there, Nellie!" he added, soothingly. "Don't cry—that's a pretty pet! Come, we'll go down and look at the white chickens, and you shall play with them."

"Oh my!" she cried, clapping her hands; and the tears vanished.

She skipped along by his side, clinging to his hand, as they walked along towards the poultry-yard.

To tell the truth, Will Hammond began to have

a mortal fear of his tiny niece, and he exerted himself so much to please her that she declared again and again that it was the most splendid day that she had ever seen.

When dinner was over, the nurse took Nellie away for her afternoon nap, and Will reclined in a hammock, stretched on the porch, to smoke his cigar and dream of Rena Browning.

He fell into a dose, and was aroused by a merry ringing peal of laughter, which caused him to spring from the hammock.

He stared about him, and there on the lawn, not twenty-five yards from the porch, was his niece Nellie and Miss Rena Browning.

At sight of them he would have fled; but Rena came towards him, and he was forced to remain.

He bowed a little awkwardly, and went down to meet her, although he would have much rather run away.

"I came over to pay your sister a visit," she said, and her eyes twinkled merrily. "I didn't know she had gone to the city until Nellie told me. By the way, Mr. Hammond, I never knew that you were an actor before. We must have you in our next theatricals. Nellie inherits the talent, if I may so put it, for she has been giving me a wonderfully amusing imitation of a bit of acting of yours that was quite Romeo-like."

There was not a flush upon her face as she raised her soft, grey eyes; but his face was scarlet with mortification.

He had never before been aware of any homicidal tendencies in his nature; but at that particular moment he could have strangled his niece Nellie with great pleasure.

He glared at her so savagely that the child's lip began to tremble.

"I was only amosin' her, Uncle Will," she faltered.

What could he say? What apology could he make?

He tried to think; but all his thoughts were confused.

He knew that he had been placed in a very ridiculous light, and it was perhaps with the courage born of desperation that he stepped quickly forward and caught Rena Browning's hand in his.

"It was not acting, Rena," he said in a trembling voice. "I feel that way, and those were the words I would have uttered if I could ever have plucked up the courage. If you were the Juliet, what answer would you make?"

She said nothing, but stood with downcast eyes and blushing face, her hand trembling in his.

"Would it have been 'Yes, Rena!' he ventured, bending towards her.

"I—I think so," she whispered, and he caught her in his arms.

Mrs. May Stevens thoroughly enjoyed Bernhard's Theodora.

Her pleasure was increased by this telegram, which her husband received just before leaving the office,—

"Congratulate me, old fellow. R. has accepted. Thank Nellie for bringing it about. Bring her up the handsomest doll to be found; I'll pay for it."

"WILL."

HER FATHER'S SECRETARY.

—10—

CHAPTER XLIV.

At the very moment this exciting scene was taking place in court quite another, and one equally exciting, was transpiring at the house.

All the servants were at the court, all save one maid who had been detained at home to attend to Gwen, who complained of illness.

"I cannot go," she had said to Rupert when he earnestly requested her to accompany him. "I could not sit through that trial and look upon Gladys' face—it would kill me!"

Rupert left Gwen thinking more kindly of her than he had ever thought of her in his life before.

"Gwen's more tender of heart than I ever dreamed," he told himself. "She feels great sympathy and pity for poor Gladys."

Left to herself Gwen sank down cold and shivering on the nearest chair.

"No, no! I could never have gone there and listened to that trial. I should have expected some horrible spectacle would suddenly rise and confront me, crying out:

"'You did it! you burned the Mount, Gwen-dolen Dane, hoping to destroy poor Gladys, whom you had thrust into the tower, and thus efface all trace of your guilt. Gladys is innocent. She shall come down and you shall occupy the prisoner's place.'"

"She will be proved guilty and be sent to prison for many years," muttered Gwen. "That is how it will end. Well, that is the next best thing to her death to rid me of her presence. She has led a charmed life, I often think, for I could not succeed in getting her out of the way; but nothing can happen now to prevent her from being sent to prison;" and Gwen uttered a laugh that sounded blood-curdling even to her own ears.

At that moment the sound of angry voices in the lower corridor fell upon her ears, and a great trembling and fear seized her.

"Why should I be frightened at every sound?" she muttered, throwing open her door and going out into the corridor and leaning over the balustrade to listen.

"I tell you young Mrs. Dane will see no one to-day," declared her maid. "She has a very bad headache, and is lying down."

"You must ask her to see me," said a woman's voice that sounded familiar to Gwen.

"But my orders are not to disturb my lady," persisted the girl.

"But my business is of the utmost importance," urged the other.

"It is not of such great importance but that it can wait until to-morrow," retorted the girl.

"I have done pleading with you. Now I command you to go to your mistress and say a woman is here who must and will see her, and see her at once," cried the stranger in a tone of voice so sonorous and threatening that it must have struck terror to the maid's heart, although she answered readily enough:

"So that is the tone you take, is it, ma'am? Well, I'll just let you know this. I'm not to be coaxed, and you can just make up your mind that I'm not to be driven. I have told you that you can't see my lady, and you can't! So there's the end of it."

These words were followed by a piercing shriek, and the sound of a scuffle and a heavy body falling to the floor fell upon Gwen's strained ears, and before she could collect her bewildered, scattered senses there was a patter of hurried feet ascending the stairs, accompanied by the swish of a woman's trailing skirts, and the next instant a woman wearing a long dark cloak and a thick veil, which entirely concealed her features, stood before her.

Gwen started back haughtily.

"Who are you who dare take it upon yourself to force your way into my presence!" she demanded angrily.

"Come into your boudoir; I can talk to you better there," replied the muffled voice which puzzled Gwen so.

"Who are you who dare come here and attempt to dictate to me thus, I repeat!" cried Gwen, furiously.

"I do not wish to make a scene unless you force me to do it," replied the woman, throwing back her veil.

Gwen beheld without some curiosity the nurse whom the doctors had sent to attend Gladys while she lay ill beneath that roof, and her brows darkened as she also remembered this was the woman who absolutely refused to leave the room one night when she requested to be left alone with Gladys, retorting that she intended to stay right there by her bedside, and furthermore, to see that the girl was not left alone for a instant, night or day.

"You think you remember me!" said the woman, looking keenly at Gwen from behind her blue glasses.

"Yes, I remember you," replied Gwen, haughtily.

"Will you come into your boudoir and listen to what I have to say to you?" she asked, hoarsely.

"Decidedly not," retorted Gwen, promptly. "You can have nothing to say to me that would be of the slightest interest to me to hear."

"You are mistaken there," blazed the woman. "I have come to talk to you of Gladys, the innocent girl who is to stand her trial to-day, charged with burning of The Mount."

"Well?" said Gwen, in a cold, haughty voice.

She spoke the word indifferently enough, but the woman standing before her saw her turn pale to the lips and clench her hands.

"She is innocent," said the woman, in a slow peculiar voice.

"She is attempting to prove that before the court to-day," returned Gwen, feeling horribly uncomfortable under the keen, penetrating gaze of the sharp eyes regarding her so steadfastly from behind those ominous blue glasses.

"She must prove it!" said the woman, coming a step nearer Gwen, and uttering the words sharply in her startled ear.

"I—hope she can," returned Gwen, steadily feeling a chilliness like a cold wave creeping all over her.

"You must help her prove her entire innocence!" said the woman, shortly.

"Are you here to insult me, knowing that I am alone with but one maid-servant?" cried Gwen, her face growing dark and stormy as she added: "When the male members of the household return you will be held accountable for this never fear! I say, in conclusion, leave this house. You will find out, I fancy, what it means to force your way into another's home. If my servants were here I should order them to throw you bodily into the street."

"I hardly think so," returned the woman, commencing very deliberately to remove her veil and hat; and before Gwen had time to utter the words that were on her lips, the grey wig and spectacles she had worn she tore quickly off, and Marie stood revealed before Gwen's dilated, terror-stricken eyes.

"Marie!" she gasped, incoherently, leaning heavily back against the balustrade for support.

"Do I dream, or do my eyes deceive me in seeing Marie standing before me?" and the words, as they fell from her white lips sounded like nothing human.

"Yes, I am Marie," was the stern answer. "Now will you refuse to take me to your boudoir and hear what I have to say! Your maid is listening in the lower corridor."

Without a word Gwen turned and led the way to her boudoir, taking care to tightly close the door after her.

"Now," she panted, waving Marie to the nearest seat, but remaining standing herself, leaning heavily against the door with her back to it "now tell me what has brought you here—why are you going about in disguise, what have you done that you are trying to conceal yourself from the public gaze?"

Marie laughed satirically.

"You are very clever in attempting to turn the tables upon me, my lady," she said grimly, "but your little game will not work. If you must know the reason for my assuming this dis-

ONE of the rarest books known to collectors is the edition of the "Vulgate" issued by Pope Sixtus the Fifth, some time between 1585 and 1590. The book, as Disraeli describes it, "fairly swarmed with errata;" so numerous were they that a number of printed paper slips containing the proper words were pasted over the blunders, and this device proving ineffectual, on account of the immense number of mistakes, as many of the copies as could be found were called in and destroyed. A few remain, and command an extremely high price.

CHRONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "Doctors" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemists, &c., post free from Dr. Hoxs, "Glandover," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, &c., 6 Stamps

guise, I will answer that I adopted it to track you down to justice."

By this time Gwen's dauntless courage had returned to her.

"You speak in riddles, woman," she cried, harshly. "I quite believe you to be demented, yet harmless, therefore more to be pitied than feared."

"You will find I am sane enough before I get through with you, my fine lady," cried Marie, furiously, her eyes flashing.

Gwen realised that she ought to temporise with this woman, but her pride would not permit her—she could not stoop to ask the slightest favour at the hands of her former servant.

"You thought you had put me out of harm's way when you devised that dastardly scheme of making your horses run away with me, and you gloated over your triumph when I was sent to the hospital more dead than alive."

"I sent money to pay your expenses while there," said Gwen, hoarsely. "You are ungrateful."

"You could not have done otherwise under the circumstances," returned Marie, grimly. "Any lady would have seen to her maid who had met with such an accident in her service; and I took notice," Marie went on grimly, "that you did not do this either until I was transferred to the hospital of the incurables, and you had every reason to believe that I would never leave my bed alive."

"That is merely your opinion, which does not make it so," returned Gwen.

"I did not come here to discuss that," said Marie. "I am here to demand justice of you—yes, of you, Gwendolen Dane, for the poor little creature you have so foully wronged; and who is called upon to answer to-day for a crime which you, and not she, committed."

A profound silence, that was painful in its length and intensity, followed this outburst.

Then Gwen broke into a forced laugh.

"I thought you demented after I had talked with you two minutes; now I am sure of it!" she blazed; adding, in a whisper so shrill that it seemed to cut through the air like a knife: "I defy you to bring that charge against me! You could not prove it. Do you hear—you could not prove it! Who would take sides with a poor girl against a rich young woman like me!"

CHAPTER XLV.]

"I CAN prove the charge I bring against you," replied Marie. "I was just entering the gates of The Mount on the night Gladys went to you, and I followed her into the grounds and heard all that passed between you."

"I heard you lure her into the house, and I knew when I saw a light flash in the upper windows a moment later, that you had lured the girl into the tower."

"I wanted to get some money from you to buy my silence. I thought you would come back into the grounds, and I waited almost an hour—late as it was. As you did not come, I crept back to the hospital from which I had stolen away, for the doctors had all said I must not venture out yet."

"I had a relapse, and I did not leave my bed again until after The Mount had been burned to the ground."

"I knew quite well then, as I know now, that poor, trusting, innocent Gladys never did it—that it was your work; that you wanted to get her out of the way, for it is an old habit you have of trying to rid yourself of those who know your crimes."

Gwen looked unflinchingly at the woman's face. She was like a stag brought to bay at the edge of a precipice.

"Hark you!" she cried, "asserting a thing and proving it are entirely different matters! Dare to bring those charges against me, and I will say that the whole story is a base fabrication from beginning to end; and now ask yourself this question: Is not my word as good as yours? You might bring your charges, but I repeat you could not prove what you claim. Think what would happen then."

"It will be corroborating Gladys's story," said Marie, triumphantly.

A horribly wicked laugh broke from Gwen's lips.

"I do not know where you have been that you are not better informed in regard to this matter," she cried, with glittering eyes. "You do not seem to know that Gladys's memory is entirely a blank in regard to all the past, and yet you came here and nursed her through her illness. Coming in disguise, by the way, was a clever bit of work on your part, but would not speak well in your favour if it were disclosed, you would find."

"I took an old lady's place whom the doctors engaged to come here," said Marie, stolidly. "I wanted to get beneath this roof unknown, that I might watch you, and I succeeded."

"And may I ask what you found out?" sneered Gwen.

"Yes; I know what that trance poor Gladys fell into meant," said Marie, stolidly. "I wanted to get beneath this roof unknown, that I might watch you, and I succeeded."

"It is false!" shrieked Gwen, excitedly. "You are a fiend incarnate to dare get up such a thing!"

"And now in regard to the loss of memory: You think you are safe because the girl cannot recall events, and therefore your crimes are hidden, and will be for all time; but mark me, my lady, and listen well to what I say. There is an antidote for the poisonous drug you administered to the girl. Ten drops of it will clear that clouded brain again, and all the events of the past will come back to her mind quick as a flash of lightning. Then she will cry out and accuse you of forcing her into the tower and confining her there, and I can corroborate her story. Now, Mrs. Rupert Dane, what have you to say?"

Gwen's face had turned from white to purple as she listened. She realised that she was being cornered; that disgrace and ruin lay like a yawning chasm before her, and that her feet were close to the precipice.

She had tried bold defiance with Marie, and her heart failed her when she found that it was quite useless. In fear and desperation she tried another course. She said to herself:

"Money will buy Marie's silence. Money is the woman's one weakness. The power of gold is mighty."

Gwen sank down in a chair opposite her.

"Let us talk this matter over calmly, Marie," she said, in a hoarse voice.

"I am calm enough, my lady," returned Marie, sullenly.

"Let me know what it is that you expect me to do! How can I do any more than has already been done to set the girl free? My husband has done everything that money can do."

"You must do what all the gold in the world will not accomplish!" said Marie, sternly. "You must come to court and proclaim her innocence; you must tell the truth—that you did it, and not she!"

"Are you mad, woman, to think I would run my own neck into the halter in that fashion?" cried Gwen, springing to her feet, and pacing the room excitedly up and down.

"You must do it, whether you wish it or not!" retorted Marie. "The innocent must not suffer for the guilty! You must come with me to the court—now! We have not a moment to spare!"

"Listen, Marie!" cried Gwen, incoherently. "Why not adjust this matter amicably between you and me? What will it take to buy your silence? How much, Marie, to go quietly away and drop this matter forever? What if I promise you a small fortune—money sufficient

to live at your ease the rest of your life—money for a comfortable house, and servants to wait on you—money enough to procure a horse and carriage! You will then be a lady—you will never know want again. What do you say, Marie?"

"Your promises are like glass, my lady," declared Marie, bluntly. "and I have learned that they are quite as easily broken. You made an agreement with me once to give me money to go away and not reveal the story I knew concerning Gladys and the Black Pool. Look at your treachery on the very day following. Did you not give those horses a sudden blow which caused them to run away with me after I had got into the vehicle?"

"No, no!" cried Gwen, with a fine show of earnestness. "How could you imagine anything so horrible as that! I am quite horrified, Marie!"

"A human life is not much to you, my lady, when it stands between you and your desires," was the determined answer.

Gwen's eyes flashed; the look in them might have warned Marie that there was danger in dealing with so desperate a woman.

"You do not answer me!" cried Gwen, hoarsely. "Will money buy your silence? I am a rich woman; I can afford to be most liberal with you."

"What do you call being liberal?" said Marie, a slight flush creeping into her cheeks as she looked at Gwen.

Her words gave Gwen much hope; she believed Marie was wavering, and we all have heard that those who hesitate are lost.

"You can name your own price," whispered Gwen, hoarsely. "It is a chance in a life-time, Marie. Weigh it well before you refuse to accept it."

"Give me a moment's time to decide," cried Marie, nervously. "Sit where you are and don't speak. Let me think. You tempt me cruelly with your offer—let me think it over."

"Yes, consider it," returned Gwen, softly. "You are very poor now; think what it would be to have wealth and power—to never know toll and want again. Consider well, Marie, for you have your future in your own hands."

Marie folded her hands tightly together and looked thoughtfully out of the window. She was face to face with the greatest temptation of her life. Surely Heaven might find pardon for her if she yielded.

She had known every privation that grim poverty is heir to—what it meant to toll early and late for the cost of a scanty meal—what it meant to be turned out into the street in the fierce bitter blast of a winter's storm because she had not succeeded, with all her toil, in scraping together the miserable little sum needed to keep the roof over her head.

Al! had she not cried out many a time that life was unbearable! Could she put from her this golden opportunity and face a life of toll again? And words she had often heard flitted quickly through her mind:

"Fortune never knocks but once at any one's door." Al! what could she not do if wealth were but hers.

Then came the crushing thought of the price she would have to pay for it—poor Gladys would be sent to a prison cell.

Al! her silence would mean a fate a thousand times more cruel than death to the pretty young girl whom she knew to be innocent.

The face of Gladys rose before her, pale, beautiful, pathetic, and she could almost imagine she could see the girl kneeling at her feet, crying out that she was the only one in the wide world who could help her—that she should make Gwen confess her guilt and thereby save her.

A scene that had occurred many and many a long month ago came back to her.

It was that of Christmas-time when the Melvilles had granted her a short leave of absence, angry enough at her "going in their busy time," as they termed it—even though the mother who had sent for her lay very ill, and they had barely given her enough money to pay her fare there and back. In a burst of confidence and with

bitter tears she had told Gladys Barton about it.

She never forgot the expression of pity on the girl's beautiful face as Gladys took from her pocket a little purse and emptied its contents—a handful of pennies—into Marie's lap.

"Take these for the sake of your sick mother Marie," she said, in her sweet sympathizing voice. "I only wish I had more to give you for your mother's sake. If the time ever comes when you are able to repay me, you can do it; if not, do not let it trouble you. Oh, Marie! poor as you are, you are rich in having a mother to love you."

A great gush of tears blinded Marie's eyes as she remembered that scene. She turned slowly around to Gwen.

"I have made up my mind as to what I will do," she said, slowly.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GWEN watched the struggle going on in Marie's mind, which was so clearly depicted on her face, with breathless interest, for her decision meant all that was dear in life to her, and when Marie turned slowly around and said: "I have decided as to what I will do," Gwen fairly held her breath with excitement.

"Well?" she whispered at length in a hoarse voice.

"You must come and confess all, and set poor Gladys free," replied Marie, firmly.

"And I answer that I will die before I will ever do it!" shrieked Gwen, wildly. "Do you hear! I say I will die first!"

Marie knew well that Gwen was desperate enough to keep her word if given the least opportunity.

"You must come with me quietly and at once," said Marie. "We have no time to lose."

In vain Gwen flung herself upon her knees, crying out to Marie to show her mercy.

"The innocent must not suffer for the sins of the guilty," replied Marie. "Come we must make all haste."

Gwen rose slowly from her knees.

"You have made up your mind that I must go with you to the court—and confess all!" said Gwen, in a hoarse whisper that sounded scarcely human.

"Yes," replied Marie.

"You will grant me one request first?" pleaded Gwen. "I—I want to write one word of farewell to Rupert, for when he has heard all, I will be as one dead to him; he will abhor me—will never look upon my face again. Surely Marie, you are not cruel enough to refuse me that much!"

"Let your note be brief," returned Marie. "I can but remind you how time is flying, and every moment is precious."

With unsteady steps Gwen crossed to the opposite side of the room to her writing-desk, Marie's keen eyes following her every movement.

With hands that trembled pitifully Gwen opened the desk and drew forth a sheet of paper; but closely as Marie was watching her she did not notice what else she took out with it.

"I cannot write, Marie," she cried out at length; "my hand shakes so."

Guiltily though she knew her to be, Marie could not help but pity her.

"Ah, me!" sobbed Gwen, bitterly, "how bright life began for me and how cruelly it is ending. In this bitter moment, as I sit here reviewing it, I cry out to Heaven that my parents are to blame, for they never taught me self-denial; I had but to express a wish for a thing, and if money could buy it it was mine."

"When love came to me I believed that I must win the love that I craved, no matter what stood in the way. You do not know what it is to love, Marie, and you do not know the torture it is to a passionate heart like mine to lose that love. The pangs of death are not more terrible to contemplate or endure, and when the realization first came to me that Rupert preferred plain, humble Gladys Barton to me I went almost mad."

At first I could not credit it. It seemed absurd that anyone could choose pale, timid

Gladys Barton to a girl like myself, one might as well have thought that he would have preferred a common field daisy to a beautiful flower.

"I gave myself up, heart and soul, to the thought of winning him back when I found he was beginning to care for Gladys and the bitter battles I fought with myself seemed almost to turn me to a fiend incarnate. One thought seemed ever present in my mind; if Gladys were dead he would care for me. You have heard that the poets say

"Love makes or mars a life,"

and never were there truer words, for the power love holds over us is as strong as life itself.

"Heaven only knows how I loved Rupert. I could think of nothing else but him, and oh! how I hated Gladys! It is always the pale, innocent-looking girls that do the greatest mischief in this world, for they gain the love of men, and then there is a reckoning between them and the dark, passionate women."

"I am not sorry that I tried to kill her," she cried. "My only regret is that I did not succeed. She lives in spite of me. She must bear a charmed life!"

"Ah, me! It was a most unfortunate hour for me when first I brought her into my home and introduced her to my lover,

"When will young girls ever learn the great risk they run in having girl friends!"

"When a man truly loves, but one woman's face is enshrined in his heart," said Marie, pitying Gwen's great distress.

"Men are fickle in love," Gwen went on, not noticing Marie's remark. "It is dangerous to throw one's lover in contact with a new and pretty face. One is always on the alert for treachery on the part of an avowed enemy, but one seldom suspects a friend."

I trusted Gladys Barton, and brought her into my home to help me with my love affair, foolish girl that I was, and it ended by her winning my lover from me. What mercy could I have been expected to show her after that!"

She saw Marie glance apprehensively at the little pearl and gold clock on the mantel.

"I will commence my few lines to Rupert at once," she said; and for a moment she wrote rapidly, her tears falling like rain on the page before her, and almost blotting the words she had written.

"My DARLING," she wrote, "when you read what I have written here, I shall be no more, for just at this moment I have taken a deadly drug, and in five minutes' time it will result in death. Only five minutes between me and eternity! They will tell you what I have done, how I threw Gladys into the Black Pool and how I set fire to The Mount after luring her into the Tower."

"Of what use to deny it, as I stand here on the border of eternity! But even while I confess these things to you, my last prayer is that you will not hate me for them, Rupert, for, oh! my love, my love whom I have loved too well! it was all done because of my passionate love for you!"

"When they tell you of my sin, say to yourself: 'My poor Gwen, all this would never have happened but for her idolatrous love for me,' and in saying the words, find pardon for me, your adoring, unhappy wife."

"My sin has found me out, and I am not strong enough to endure the look of abhorrence in your eyes. I—Oh, Heaven! the throes of death are upon me, darling! My head reels—my sight fades—I—"

There was a long, irregular dash of the pen, and Gwen dropped back in her chair with the most blood-curdling laugh that ever fell from human lips.

"See! I have outwitted you!" she cried, holding up a small vial before Marie's eyes. "It was half full. I have swallowed it all, and I am dying, but you shall die first, you, who have tracked me down to my grave! Ha!" she cried, springing like a tigress, so swift and sudden was the motion, between Marie and the door.

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"I know you—you are Gladys Barton, come here to taunt me with having won Rupert's love from me!"

Marie had sprung to her feet, and stood there like one petrified.

In a flash she realized the truth. Gwen had outwitted her and had swallowed a portion of the deadly drug of which she had given Gladys, and insanity, instead of the death she had hoped for, had come upon her.

Yes, she was in the presence of a maniac! and Gwen had sprung between her and the door.

Marie now realized that Gwen had mistaken her for Gladys, and her death would pay the forfeit. Marie tried to pray; but all her thoughts seemed chaos in her brain.

There was no help near, as the house was deserted. Even the little maid she had encountered at the door was powerless to aid her, for she had swooned when she pushed past her, and in all probability lay where she had left her in the entrance hall below.

There would be no one near to hear her if she cried out for help—not one soul.

Ah! why had she foreseen this?

"Yes, I am going to die," cried Gwen, with another shrill, blood-curdling laugh, "but you must die first! Say your prayers, if you know any, for your last moment has come!"

It was a moment that seemed to Marie the length of eternity. Gwen crept close to her—so near that her hot breath fanned her cheek, and the strangely glittering eyes held her spell-bound—fascinated, as the eyes of a serpent holds and charms a bird whom it has marked for its prey.

And in that moment a thought that proved her salvation came to Marie.

She remembered reading once of a man who suddenly found himself in the presence of a madman, and who succeeded in saving his own life by his coolness and bravery.

The madman had declared to the man that he was there for the purpose of taking his life, and the man at once agreed with the maniac that such an action would be perfectly proper, and kept up a brisk conversation on the subject until some pedestrians came into the lonely street, and he was saved.

The thought was an inspiration to Marie. She must take her life in her own hands.

She felt a terrible faintness creep over her, and it was only by a superhuman effort that she kept from fainting.

She was now quite sure that Gwen must hear the loud beating of her terrified heart.

Ah! if she was but out in the free, open air again, safe—safe!

She was beyond all hope of helping Gladys Barton now, unless a miracle saved her, and by the time that golden sun, which was shining in so brightly at the window, was an hour higher she would be lying there cold in death—murdered by a maniac's hand—and Gladys the poor innocent girl whom she had risked her own life to rescue from her cruel fate, would be on her way to a prison cell, there to remain for long years—perhaps till death!

(To be continued.)

ONE of the many strange sights on the plains of Southern Africa is a party of waltzing ostriches. Their queer antics have been described thus:—"When there are a number of them, they will start off in the morning, and after running a few hundred yards will stop, and with raised wings will whirl rapidly round till they are stupefied or perhaps break a leg. The males pose also before fighting and to make their court. They kneel on their ankles, opening their wings, and balancing themselves alternately forward and backward or to one side or the other, while the neck is stretched on a level with the back and the head strikes the sides, now on the right, now on the left, while the feathers are bristling. The bird appears at this time so absorbed in its occupation as to forget all that is going on around him and can be approached and caught. The male alone utters a cry, which sounds much like an effort to speak with the mouth shut tight."

FAETIÆ.

PROFESSOR: "How would you punctuate this sentence—'Miss Wood, a pretty girl of eighteen, walked down the avenue!' Young Student: "I would make a dash after 'Miss Wood.'"

"How will you have your eggs cooked?" asked the waiter. "Make any difference in the cost of 'em!" inquired the customer, cautiously. "No." "Then cook 'em with a nice slice of ham!" said the customer, greatly relieved.

MRS. DUNLEIGH: "It is very singular that your mother always happens to call on me when I am out." Little Flosie Dimpleton: "Oh, we can see from our front window whenever you go away."

A YOUNG man said to his companions the other day: "I was at a party last evening and saw a lovely lady nursing a dog, and, to tell you the truth, I envied that dog." "Never mind," remarked one, with whom he was not popular, "you'll soon grow."

"OUR cat has just had chickens," remarked Toadhole. "Nonsense, Mr. T—," snorted his spouse, "you must be inebriated. I suppose you mean our cat has had kittens." "No, I don't," meekly murmured the poor fellow. "I brought home a couple of chickens for to-morrow's dinner, but Sarah tells me the cat has eaten them."

SCENE: (KENTISH FARM).—Tramp: "Could you give a poor man a little assistance or find him some employment?" Farmer: "You can have some work on the spot. I have a heap of wood yonder." Tramp: "Hum—ha, yes—I'll send you the man directly. It's not for myself I am seeking a job, but for a friend of mine."

"I SAY," said the man who lives in a boarding-house, "I've found the ideal place at last." "What is the advantage?" asked his neighbour. "The neatness of the place. The landlady keeps all the left-over crusts separate and labelled, so that each man gets his own bread back in the bread-pudding."

DR. ABERNETHY, a famous Scotch physician, was extremely averse to being called after he had retired for the night. One night his bell was vehemently rung. "Hurry, doctor!" cried the man. "My son has swallowed a mouse!" "Tell him to swallow a cat, and let sleeping men alone," roared the doctor, as he slammed the door in his visitor's face.

SCENE:—(Suburban villa). Mistress: "Did any one call while I was out?" Servant: "No one, ma'am, exceptin' a tramp. He wanted somethin' to eat, but I told him there was nothin' ready, an' he'd have to wait till the laddy of the house gets back from the cookin' school, an' maybe she'd make him somethin'." Mistress: "Of all things! Did he wait?" Servant: "No, ma'am, he ranned!"

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SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales is in deepest mourning for her mother. It is the custom for Royal ladies attending funerals to wear crape veils which entirely envelop them. These look very gloomy and depressing, but they afford privacy to the Royal mourner. Our Princess always wears crape when in mourning, although disliking to touch it.

It is quite expected that the betrothal of Queen Wilhelmina to Prince Wilhelm of Wied will be announced very shortly. The engagement will be very popular in Holland, where the Princess of Wied, who was the younger daughter of the late Prince Friedrich of the Netherlands, is a great favourite.

AMONG the presents sent to the young Queen of Holland was a splendid and curious offering from the Sultan of Siak. It is a prize elephant's tusk, which contains ornaments in the shape of hearts in gold, incrustated with precious stones. The tusk itself is richly sculptured, being surrounded with all kinds of Indian flowers and fruits delicately painted in the softest shades.

THE Queen of Sweden is one of the most truly philanthropic women in existence. She was married to King Oscar forty-one years ago, and it is no exaggeration to say that every year has added something to the loyal affection in which she is held by her husband's subjects. Before her marriage her Majesty was the Princess Sophie of Orange-Nassau.

PRINCESS CHARLES OF DENMARK is to remain in England for many months, and after what has, indeed, been very much like exile to her, she will be able to reside once more in her pretty little home at Appleton. For a while, however, she will stay at Sandringham with the Princess of Wales, and then, when she goes over to her own house, it is most likely that she will take Princess Victoria of Wales with her. Prince Charles, meanwhile, will cruise with his uncle, Prince Waldemar.

CHINESE ladies have hitherto not entered London society, and we have rarely had the opportunity of seeing them in our streets and parks. The wife of the present Chinese Minister is, however, making a new departure. She is learning English as fast as she can, and is to be formally presented at the first Drawing Room of 1899. She intends, with the assistance of Lady Macartney, the wife of the English Secretary, to mix freely in society, and it is expected that her plucky action will have the effect of breaking down much prejudice on the part of her compatriots against English customs.

THE oldest Queen in Europe, since the death of the Queen of Denmark, is the Queen of Hanover, who will be eighty-one next April, whilst in the following month our Queen will be eighty. The Empress Eugénie, who may well be included, comes third, being seventy-three in the same month. Among the Princesses of Europe, Princess Clementine of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha exceeds all the Queens and Emperesses in age, being eighty-two next year; Princess Alexandra, of that house, widow of Duke Ernest, and sister-in-law of the Prince Consort, coming next with seventy-eight years in December.

BROCKET HALL, where the Duke of York is to be the guest of Lord Mount-Stephen, is a large, plain, well-arranged house, with some fine rooms. The grounds are very pretty, and contain a great number of splendid old trees. The Lea forms a lake at the bottom of the lawn, and there is a fine cascade. Brocket was the favourite residence of William Viscount Melbourne, who died there in 1849. The large Melbourne estates then passed to his brother, Lord Bessborough, who also succeeded to the Viscounty of Melbourne, on whose death in 1853 the whole property was inherited by Lady Palmerston, and from her it came to her grandson, Lord Cowper. Since the death of Lady Palmerston the place has nearly always been let, and it was rented for some years by the late Lord Lawrence. There is excellent shooting on the estate, which is well wooded.

STATISTICS.

THE average height of the elephant is 9ft. GREAT BRITAIN spends on tobacco and pipes about £14,000,000 every year.

OF the 25,000 officials in Berlin, as many as 17,000 give their services free. About 4,000 of these superintend the charity affairs, and 2,000 preside over educational interests, &c.

AN average waltz takes a dancer over about three-quarters of a mile, a square dance makes him cover half a mile. A girl with a well-filled programme travels thus in one evening: Twelve waltzes, nine miles; four other dances at half a mile a piece, which is hardly a fairly big estimate, two miles more; the intermission stroll and the trips to the dressing-room to renovate her gown and complexion, half a mile; grand total, eleven and a half miles.

GEMS.

THE disappointments hardest to bear are those in which our emotions are deeply concerned.

PERFECT ignorance is quiet; perfect knowledge is quiet—not so the transition from the former to the latter.

ADVICE, like snow, the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon, and the deeper it sinks into, the mind.

OUR conscience is far harder than our bitterest enemies, knows more, and accounts with more nicety, and is harder to be appeased.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TOMATO PILAU.—Cut up in thin slices one pound of breakfast bacon and fry it. When brown or crisp pour in one quart can of tomatoes and one pint of cooked rice. Let it fry until dry and crisp and serve hot.

APPLE SALAD.—One bunch celery, cut fine, three large apples cut in small pieces, with celery. Dressing—Two eggs, half a cup of sugar, one teaspoonful mustard, half a teaspoonful salt, a little butter and pepper, one cup of vinegar. Boil a few minutes and pour over hot.

A DELICIOUS DISH.—Prepare sweetbreads, cut into equal slices and remove the skins and little pipes. Take about three dozen oysters, strain off the liquor. Put the sweetbreads into a stew pan and cover with the oyster liquor. Add three large spoonfuls of roast veal gravy and a quarter of a pound of fresh butter, cut into bits and rolled in flour. When the sweetbreads are done, put in the oysters and let them cook five minutes. Add two wineglasses of sweet cream, stir up well and serve in a hot dish.

STUFFED ONIONS.—Peel and parboil the onions in water with a little salt; take them out with a strainer, lay them in cold water, then put them on a sieve to drain. Prepare a mixture made of equal parts of veal and ham, or bacon well minced, one soaked milk roll, salt, pepper, and the yolks of one or two eggs. When these ingredients are in a thick paste, cut off the top of the onion to form a cover, and with a spoon cut out the heart; fill the space with the stuffing, put on the cover, and tie each onion round with thread to keep it well together. Arrange them side by side in a flat, shallow saucepan or frying-pan, moisten with a little butter, and some good strong meat gravy, and set them over the fire till they begin to brown; now place them in a fire-proof dish, sprinkle them with bread crumbs, put them in the oven for a few minutes, and serve them with a small piece of fresh butter, worked with finely-chopped parsley and chives on each side.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Chinese have a flower which is white at night or in the shade and red in the sunlight.)

It is said the entire African race in America is gradually becoming bleached out, and that in the progress of years the black face will disappear entirely.

BUDDHIST fishermen in Siam justify their trade by declaring that they do not kill the fish, but only take them out of the water, whereupon the fish die a natural death.

Few people are aware of the immense weight which a diver carries with him under the water. The diving boots alone sometimes weigh 100 pounds each.

VERY little furniture is used in the bedrooms of Turkish houses. Rarely is a chair seen in any of them. A few mats adorn the room, and the bed is stretched on the floor.

FOR centuries the blood of living horses has been used as a nourishing beverage by the Tartars. They carefully open a vein in the neck of a horse, take a drink of the animal's blood, and then close the wound with a plaster.

CERTAIN caves have been reported as maintaining a uniform temperature, summer and winter, of 54 degrees Fahrenheit. They may be said to breathe twice a year—inhalating during the winter and exhaling during the summer.

A CURIOUS remedy for sleeplessness is used by the inhabitants of the Samoan Islands. They confine a snake in a hollow bamboo, and the hissing sound emitted by the reptile is said to quickly induce slumber.

HABIT and practice sharpen gifts; the necessity of toil grows less disgusting, grows even welcome, in the course of years; a small taste (if it be only genuine) waxes with indulgence into an exclusive passion.

A PECULIAR industry of Kern County, California, is the collection and shipment of horned toads. They are sold to the Chinese, who use them for medicinal purposes. They are considered especially valuable in the treatment of rheumatism.

THE giraffe has such powers of mimicry that, although its size might be supposed to make it a conspicuous object to its enemies, the most practised eye has been deceived by the animal's resemblance to one of the dead and blasted tree-trunks which abound in its haunts.

THE tide-like effect of gales on lakes having no ordinary tides is very considerable. In the Caspian a gale will raise the water on one side six feet, causing a total difference of level of twelve feet; and in Lake Erie heavy gales occasionally cause a difference of level of more than fifteen feet.

So many accidents have occurred from the fall of staging that many devices looking to safety in its construction cannot fail to be of interest to many persons. A clamp, holding the cross section and the upright firmly together, is an invention of great value. The construction of the clamp is such that the greater the weight of the cross section the more firmly the teeth of the clamp press into the upright. They are anchored by pressure from the opposite direction, and a sharp blow from a small hammer releases the clamp when the cross-piece is removed. This device has its advantages from different points of view. Continual nailing breaks the grain of the wood, and the breaking apart almost invariably splits off some portion of the timber, so after a time it is worthless, unless the broken ends are cut away and whole wood furnished. By this invention there is merely the pressure of the teeth into the surface of the wood, which operation may be repeated indefinitely with very little damage to the fibre. There is not only a support for its end, but a holder for the cross-pieces. A man may carry, strung on a stick on his shoulder, the necessary clamps to put up an ordinary staging, and neither hammer or nails are required in any portion of it.

On TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22nd, we shall publish our

CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER, PRICE 2d.

Full particulars of which will be announced in our next issue.

This Number will be found to be up to our usual high standard, and Readers are recommended to order it at once from their Newsagent.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. B.—Queen's Honorary Physician.
INQUIRER.—It means "errors excepted."
VINUM.—The grapes ought not to be too ripe.
NEMO.—Make application to the examining body.
TRADESMAN.—The best market is London; prices vary greatly.
AMICUS AMY.—Quite impossible without personal instructions.
DABBY.—White wax; you can buy it blacked ready for the work.
LADY BETTY.—You could not have anything better for your purpose.
STREW.—The Bank of England does not allow interest on deposit accounts.
AMATEUR.—Absolutely necessary unless you are competent to do it yourself.
R. F.—Only a lawyer can advise you what steps to take in the circumstances now existing.
CRADRON.—Neither date nor address necessary; the signature should be written by the debtor.
IMPERYANCE.—There being no will, the personal property must be divided equally amongst all the children.
HOCKEYMAN.—The same recipe will answer your purpose. An immense quantity if it is made every year for pira.
RAX.—All we can do is to refer you to the situation advertisements, where agents of various kinds are often wanted.
FATIGUED READER.—The firm you mention would, no doubt, take an order. You will find their address in the directory.
HELM.—Put the pieces in kerosene oil and let them remain there for a number of days; then polish with emery powder.
ROMANUS.—If it is really a polish, not a varnish, you are using, the drying substance most advisable is methylated spirits.
STAGE LOVER.—Sir Henry Irving and Sir Squire Bancroft are the only actors who have been knighted during the present reign.
JANET.—The Archbishop of Canterbury takes rank immediately after members of the Royal Family, and before every other peer.
MOXA.—Hang the clothes before a brick fire or in the sun; small should disappear in ordinary course with one or two days' wearing.
DEPRESSED.—No time should be lost in getting good medical advice, which is plentiful enough in your town; few ailments are absolutely incurable nowadays.
MOTHER.—Food should never be allowed to stay in a tin can or on a tin plate where air can get to it. Poles can most surely be developed in such a case.
BARRETT.—If you are unable to determine, or lack the courage to find out by a proposal of marriage, it is not to be expected that anyone else can aid you.
SCOTSMAN.—The volume is of no value, and would, in fact, hardly bring expenses at a bookstall; Sir Walter Scott's novels have been freely translated into French.
DICK.—The war correspondent came first into play during the Crimean war, forty-five years ago; in more recent campaigns he has developed and acquired importance.
THIRD OF ENGLAND.—The climate is trying to Europeans, and except very special terms are offered, we do not think you should accept the situation there just now.
LOGIE O' BUCHAN.—The difference between Scotch and Irish Gaelic is very much the difference between London and Yorkshire English; both were the same originally.
ENGINEERMAN.—The present Pope was chosen in 1878. His name is Gioacchino Pecci. He took the name of Leo because he admired especially the life of Pope Leo XII. who died in 1859.
CLARA.—The arbutus is an evergreen bush or tree, with greenish-white flowers and scarlet fruit, somewhat like a strawberry; frequently planted about mansion houses as an ornamental shrub.
DOUBTFUL DONA.—Of course she should not marry him unless he not only gives a satisfactory explanation of his conduct, but also allows the young lady's father time to ascertain if his statements are true.

MURRAY.—The process of making soda water is a very elaborate one, and requires special machinery. We do not know what the method is. Your best plan would be to apply to a manufacturer of these articles.

G. T.—We should think if the inner fabric was tanned or waterproofed before it was made up that would answer your purpose; but it is a manufacturer's rather than a household subject, and we cannot go into it.

G. D.—Oxalic acid should be used with great caution. It is almost certain to eat holes in any fabric if it is strong enough to remove rust or deep or old stains. Its weak solution it is almost worthless for any purpose.

SPOT MARK.—The only thing for you to do is to consult a dentist. Nothing you can do yourself will be of any use; and if you take proper advice now before they go too far, you will save yourself from a deal of pain and trouble later on.

V. L.—Washing in tar or carbolic soap is recommended, but is efficacious only because it drowns and smothers the parasite. Continual attention and powder have proven the best remedies, being a success when all other processes have failed.

HOME.

There is a land, of every land the pride,
 Beloved by Heaven o'er all the world beside;
 Where brighter suns dispense serener light,
 And milder moons emperadise the night;
 A land of beauty, virtue, valour, truth,
 Time-tutor'd age, and love-exalted youth.
 The Wand'ring mariner, whose eyes explore
 The wealthiest isles, the most enchanting shores,
 Views not a realm so bountiful and fair,
 Nor breathes the spirit of a purer air,
 In every clime the magnet of his soul,
 Touch'd by remembrance, trembles to that pole.
 For in this land of Heaven's peculiar grace,
 The heritage of Nature's noblest race,
 There is a spot of earth, supremely blest,
 A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest,
 Where man, creation's tyrant, ceals aside
 His sword and sceptre, pageantry and pride,
 While in his softened looks benignly blend
 The sire, the son, the husband, brother, friend.
 Here woman reigns; the mother, daughter, wife,
 Strews with fresh flowers the narrow path of life;
 In the clear heaven of her delightful eye
 An angel guard of loves and graces lie;
 Around her knees domestic duties meet,
 And freer pleasures gambol at her feet.
 Where shall that land, that spot of earth be found?
 Art thou a man? A patriot? Look around;
 Oh, thou shalt find, how'er thy footsteps roam,
 That land thy Country and that spot thy home.

DANE DURDEN.—To clean leather-covered chairs or tables, wash the leather with milk and water and curd soap. To gloss the leather use white of egg, put on with a camel-hair brush. If the colour be faded use some dye.

WORRIED HOUSEHOLD.—They are often banished by a plentiful sprinkling of powdered horax, if perseveringly and abundantly strewed in their haunts, and forced into cracks, crevices, or holes where they hide during the day time.

WORRIED MOTHER.—If the children are not very robust, the trouble may be caused by constitutional weakness. In such case good food, cod liver oil, and plenty of open-air exercise will be the best help to get rid of the unpleasant condition.

WORKS OUT.—Want of sleep is most often caused by over-activity of the brain at night. It is utterly fatal to a thorough rest to work the brain until just before going to bed. Another cause of insomnia is going to bed hungry.

R. S.—The first use of Niagara's power was made in 1725, a primitive sawmill being worked there. Nothing more was done until 1842, when the plan of hydraulic canals was conceived, and in 1861 one of them was completed.

CLARICE.—Lay it horizontally in any kind of vessel, and cover completely with clean, cold water. Set where it will keep cool, but not freeze, until ready for use. This is far preferable to standing upright and submerging the root and lower part of the leaf-stalks.

LALOR.—A medical doctor is under no legal obligation whatever to attend a case of any kind, no matter how urgent; the common belief to the contrary is quite erroneous; of course a doctor who neglected a case after taking it in hand, would be liable in damages if patient suffered in consequence of neglect.

A SOLDIER'S LAST.—A soldier who stays away from his regiment beyond the extent of his furlough is treated as a deserter—the punishment for which offence, in time of peace, is imprisonment and degradation; in time of war, death.

FLORA.—Prince Charlie was an ambitious, unfortunate, and in the end a broken man; he claimed, as he believed, what was his own; and his claim was supported by hundreds of thousands of his countrymen; events proved that the claim was not admitted by the nation at large, and he and his cause fell together.

AN ONLY SON.—It is a son's solemn duty to protect and cherish his widowed mother, but why should that interfere with his marrying? If all sons avoided marriage where would all the mothers have been? Marry, but let your wife be a girl who will recognise in your widowed mother another parent.

STUANT.—Boscobel (Shropshire) was after the defeat of Worcester, for two days the hiding-place of Charles the Second; "the royal oak" in which he concealed himself for more than four hours is now represented by a tree grown from one of its acorns; but Boscobel House still stands, an old-fashioned, half-timbered building.

M. C.—Raisins are ripe grapes dried in the sun by placing them on sloping banks of red clay at the foot of a wall, and perfectly protected by wooden covering boards, so as to keep off all rain and dew, either of which is fatal to good quality. The bunches are turned once only, with the greatest care, and in two or three weeks grapes become raisins.

ELLA.—Perfect health is necessary if one would have a skin of fine and soft texture. As to pimples, they come from various causes, which must be removed. Sometimes a little salve made of fresh butter, with slight colouring of red oxide of mercury, will kill them. But it is well always to take a physician's advice before using such powerful remedies.

R. G.—The strength of steel bars is considerably increased by the addition of carbon or silicon. Tests have been made with annealed bars of various sizes, with the results as stated. Silicon gives much greater tensile strength than carbon. This discovery is to be still further tested and other substances are to be added, with the idea that the strength of the metal may be still further increased.

MARR.—The term "round robin" is given to a written petition or protest, signed by a number of persons in a circular form, so that it may not appear who signed it first. Sometimes the names are written around a ring or circle, including the memorial or remonstrance, and sometimes they are appended to it, arranged within a circle of their own from the centre of which they radiate as the spokes of a wheel.

QUERIST.—Floors polished with beeswax and turpentine are both healthy and agreeable to the eye. The floors should be well scoured with strong soda, and then stained with a mixture of randyke brown in water, mixed with size. Warm the turpentine and dissolve the beeswax in it. Leave to cool, when it forms a jelly, and this must be well rubbed over the boards with flannel, and then polished with rags and "elbow grease."

R. G.—It is impossible to combine expedition with cheapness when getting married in England; cheapest way is for one to reside in this country for one week, then have names published at the office of the registrar of the district, and twenty-one days later the marriage could take place either at registrar's office or in a church; the other party would meanwhile have been proclaimed in church in Scotland in ordinary way; there is no publicity about that.

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